

Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology

ANNELOU YPEIJ, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SLACA in Montréal

By Andrew Ortis (SLACA Program Chair)

The Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology has selected an exciting program of panels for this year's Meetings. With sessions on topics ranging from emergent forms of biocitizenship in Mexico (5-0960), to the legacies of civil war in El Salvador (5-0095), to the enduring traces of the neoliberal state in Chile (6-0530), to modes and technologies of aesthetic consumption across the region (2-0305; 2-0870), SLACA's slate of panels reflects at once the diversity of scholarship within our Society, as well as some vital points of convergence and intersection in the anthropology of Latin America and Caribbean.

Our program of 29 panels features four invited sessions: Mobilizing around Gender and Sexuality: Feminist Ethnographic Legacies in Latin America and Caribbean (co-sponsored with AFA, 4-0370 Friday 10:15 am–12:00); Tracing the Legacies of the Ethnographic Presence: Long-Term Ethnographic Research in Latin America (4-0830 Friday 13:45–15:30); The Caribbean and its Diasporas: "Tidemarks" in Long-Term Anthropological Research (5-0390 Saturday 10:15–12:00); and Bio-Mexico: Risk, Reproduction, and Sovereignty (5-0960 Saturday 16:00–17:45).

The annual meeting theme "Traces, Tidemarks and Legacies" prompted a number of panels examining Latin American ethnography over the long term. One notable example, in addition to the invited sessions already detailed, is a panel addressing the legacy of Michael James Higgins and ethnography of urban Mexico (4-1110). The call for papers also challenged us to examine tidemarks as lines of distinction or indices of dynamic processes of change. SLACA members have responded with panels addressing themes of indigeneity and race (3-0135; 3-0140; 3-0265), class identities (4-0154; 6-0535), place-based identities (3-0770; 6-0540), as well sessions focusing on the shifting meanings of the past as encoded in Mexican archaeological heritage (5-0800), the ebbs and flows of tourism, development and migration (2-0495; 4-0140), and the legacies and challenges giving form to contemporary social and political mobilizations across the region (2-0490; 2-0655; 2-0875; 3-0725).

Speaking of legacies, SLACA continues our tradition of multilateral fun with a joint dance party and reception (with ABA, SANA, AFA, ALLA, AES, and SUNTA) on Friday beginning at 21:00 (session 4-1390 in your program). That will be a fine opportunity to expand conversations started at the SLACA Business Meeting (Friday 12:15–13:30).

Roseberry-Nash Graduate Student Award 2012: Preliminary Announcement

We invite submission of papers for our seventh Annual Roseberry-Nash Graduate Student Paper Contest. Winners receive an opportunity to publish their papers in the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, and will be presented a cash

award during the AAA meeting in San Francisco, CA, November 14–18, 2012. The paper should present findings from original research in any field of Latin American and Caribbean anthropology, and draw on relevant anthropological literature. Contestants must be enrolled in a graduate program in anthropology at the time of submitting the paper, must not have submitted their dissertation by submission deadlines, and must include the name of one mentor. Paper length must be between 4,000 and 6,000 words; text may be in English, French, Portuguese or Spanish; and contestants must have student membership in the Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology. The paper should be submitted before June 15, 2012 to Annelou Ypeij. Please email papers as attached documents to J.L.Ypeij@cedla.nl.

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

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

When Cream Is Not Cool

By Mark Allen Peterson (Miami U)

When I taught linguistic anthropology in Egypt, I used to use the untranslatability of idioms as a way to draw student attention to problems of overreliance on lexicon and syntax to understand meaning. I asked students to describe a word or phrase that made no sense when directly translated and then to provide a gloss.

One of the most commonly offered idioms was *ishta*, literally "cream." This word is used, mostly by young people, to express that something is appealing. For the most part, "cool" is a good gloss for American English speakers of my generation.

Going over some interviews taken in 2000, however, I discovered uses of *ishta* that did not fit this gloss. For example, Samir, a college student, was describing why young men of his class often prefer the traditional *ahwa* (coffee house) to the Starbucks-style coffee shops that were springing up all over Cairo. In doing so, he produced a use of *ishta* that did not fit my understanding of the word's appropriate use.

Mark: But a girl can't go to an 'ahwa?

Samir: They could go but *ishta*, the people are close-minded so it wouldn't be appropriate for them to go.

Clearly "cool" doesn't fit here. What does Samir mean? I posted a cry for help to an Egyptian graduate student listserv. I received ten responses.

The only trained linguist who responded professed herself as baffled as I, suggesting it might be a mannerism or idiolect.

The students, though, all recognized Samir's usage and offered glosses. Christine Shenouda offered "they can go but *that's fine*, they don't go because people would have bad thoughts about them." Maysa Ayoub suggested "Cool, they can go, but preferably not because people are close minded."

Wesam Younis recommended "it's okay if they go (because it isn't dangerous)."

Hassan el-Mouhi glossed the text as "if girls go it is on their own responsibility, they don't care for the people." But he also raised the possibility that *ishta* might be used here as "a common word on the speaker's tongue, like 'okay,' in order to give himself a pause or a break to rethink of the rest of the sentence."

Saif Nasrawi drew attention to the contextual nature of *ishta*, which can be deployed to mean not only "cool" but "well done," "oh, great!," "understood," and "I don't care."

Several students emphasized the "vulgar" origins of the word. Journalist Nermin Helmy claimed that a decade ago "parents were shocked when they heard the term, because to them it was associated with servants or maids ... but now it has become more acceptable." Yet *ishta* may have somewhat different meanings for people of the middle and lower classes. In the *sha'abi* (popular) community of Sayyida Zeinab, for example, Kate Pavljuk found the most common use of *ishta* to be by men "cat-calling" at women.

Ishta, wrote Kate, "also means hot." From cream, "the meaning transgressed to 'thick.' Thick is hot. Egyptian men, especially those of the lower classes ... like thick, full-figured women."

She suggested that the true meaning of *ishta* derives from its very ambiguity, its capacity to mean many things at once. Samir's use in the text perhaps expresses "the ambiguity and ambivalence of social norms amongst young university-aged Egyptians today. I took it like, 'its cool, but its not cool.' [Or] is she a good girl or a bad girl? It's cool if she wants to be a little wild, but reputation, reputation, reputation."

Nermin Helmy summarized the discussion by calling *ishta* a "joker" word: "You know how the joker in some card games can stand for any number, spade, hearts or whatever? Well that's exactly what *ishta* does. You can just stick the word anywhere, in the middle of a sentence, at the end of it, in its beginning or you can just say it alone. Most of the times it is said when there is nothing to say."

For teaching the context bound nature of most linguistic meaning, this idiom is *ishta*!

SLA in Montréal

A list of language-related panels at the annual meetings in Montréal was posted to the SLA blog September 9 by Chad Nilep. Check it out at linguisticanthropology.org/blog.

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

Guatemala STD Inoculation Study, Never Again? IRBs alone cannot prevent human rights violations

By Alejandro Cerón (U Washington; Instituto de Salud Includiente, Guatemala)

In order to test the effectiveness of penicillin to treat