Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

A Decade of Cognitive Linguistics

This past July, the Tenth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference was held at the Jagiellonian University of Krakow, Poland, under the auspices of its sponsoring organization, the International Cognitive Linguistics Association (ICLA). Though the theme of the meetings was "Cognitive Linguistics in Action: From Theory to Application and Back," it was also very much a celebration of the first decade of the subdiscipline and association. And indeed there is much for the ICLA to be proud of.

The first Cognitive Linguistics symposium was held in Germany 1989, when the association was inaugurated and the seminal journal *Cognitive Linguistics* began. Conferences have been held biennially ever since. Today, there are a dozen journals and book series on Cognitive Linguistics, and at least an equal number of websites. There are now numerous textbooks, handbooks, readers and bibliographies (www.cogling.org/research.shtml), demonstrating that the subdiscipline has matured with its own standard canon. This extensive literature also shows the growing acceptance Cognitive Linguistics has in the greater scholarly community.

I have been intentionally putting the name Cognitive Linguistics in capital letters, to separate it from generic "cognitive linguistics"—that is, any approach that studies language as a mental phenomena—and there are some important features that make it likely to attract the attention of anthropologists. This is best seen in an example.

Perhaps the most provocative and compelling paper—for anthropologists, at least—was Dirk Geeraets' plenary address on the history and development of Cognitive Linguistics at the end of the conference. He argued that most of linguistics in the 20th century was really a struggle to reconcile Ferdinand de Saussure's famous dichotomy of *la langue* (the social code possessed in aggregate by the community of speakers) vs *la parole* (the language usage and performance of the individual). Noam Chomsky, of course, tried to bridge this gap by proposing to focus on linguistic *competence* (the individual's innate knowledge of the linguistic code, regardless of his or her actual manifestations). However, this leaves linguistics decontextualized, as a serious examination of the social aspects of language is ignored. This also means that the nature of language must be genetic—if language is not social, what else can it be?—and therefore the study of meaning—the exemplar contextual and cultural aspects of language—will be, by definition, less interesting. What is really theoretically important is the formal code. The other elements get parceled out into the linguistic Balkans—the social code for sociolinguistics, performance for pragmatics, the lexicon for formal semantics and so on.

On the other hand, Geeraets argues that the project of Cognitive Linguistics is an attempt to recontextualize grammar. For Cognitive Linguists, language is primarily about meaning; that is, the processing and storage of information is the critical design feature of language. But meaning for Cognitive Linguistics is: dynamic (meanings change as the world changes); experiential (meanings are based on language use); embodied (humans are physical beings and not just pure minds); cultural (language holds social identities, collective and individual, past and present); and entails a perspective on the world (eg, "in front of the tree" or "behind the tree" can refer to the same physical location depending on the perspective you take when you speak).

Geeraets claims that Cognitive Linguistics is more of an archipelago than an island, a flexible framework of shared perspectives more than an overriding theory of language. To be sure, the topics Cognitive Linguists study are diverse—just like in anthropology—and cover everything from metaphors, phonology and literary theory to neurology, spatial representations and grammar. But this eclecticism has its fascination. And while I was attending the conference, I was surprised to see so many Cognitive Linguists happy to have a linguistic anthropologist in their midst. This was not just proselytizing: theoretical perspectives—and fieldwork and methodology—overlap with anthropological linguistics in countless ways. I even had a fascinating conversation about the alleged uniqueness of the Piraha language that has been much discussed lately (see April 2006 *AN*) by a Cognitive Linguist who actually visited them in Brazil this spring.

The Eleventh International Cognitive Linguistics Conference will be held in the summer of 2009 at the University of California at Berkeley. I suspect that many AAA and SLA members will be in attendance, and not just because of the beautiful venue, the fine dining in the San Francisco Bay area or the Berkeley bookstores.

Keith Allen and SLA member Nobuko Adachi in heated debate at the 10th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference at Krakow, Poland, July 2007. Photo courtesy Jim Stanlaw

Society for Medical Anthropology

KATHLEEN RAGSDALE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The Political Construction of Global Communicable Disease Crises
SfAA/SMA Abstract Deadline: October 15, 2007

The deadline for abstracts is fast approaching—you still have time to plan a session and/or submit a paper or poster abstract for the 2008 Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) Annual Meeting. The SfAA meeting will be held jointly with the 2008 Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA) Conference on March 25–29, 2008, in the historic and culturally rich city of Memphis, TN. The SMA is planning numerous special events during the conference, including an exciting plenary session, which will be followed by a reception.

The 2008 SMA Plenary, organized by Ruthbeth Finerman, Lenore Manderson, Carolyn Sargent and Carolyn Smith-Morris, is entitled, "The Political Construction of Global Communicable Disease Crises." According to the plenary's organizers, "Governments are charged with providing resources and support to protect public health and wellbeing. While various administrations have long been accused of neglecting this responsibility, many also increasingly manipulate health crises for political expedience. Authorities may maneuver to draw public attention to a potential threat in order to galvanize support for, and muzzle criticism of, unpopular policies. Alternately, they may seek to deflect attention from inadequate health responses or medical findings which pose political risks."

Plenary panelists will address key emerging and established infectious diseases, such as avian flu, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), cholera, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (TB). As the organizers state, "Using infectious diseases as a foundation, panelists will explore the roles of culture, globalization and political maneuvering as these influence health policy, funding priorities, responsiveness and public awareness in the face of global epidemics. The issue is especially timely for the US, as the current election year could yield profound changes in the political landscape for addressing national and international health."

The 2008 SMA Plenary reflects the SMA's ongoing commitment to engaged scholarship on health within global and local contexts. As part of this commitment, the SMA website contains new and updated resources to enhance anthropological teaching, learning and praxis, and offers links to additional site and listservs for educators and practitioners, including:

Film Database: The SMA has recently begun a database on films related to medical anthropol-