SIGNIFICATIONS OF MODALITY & VALUE

MAY 4–5, 2018

20th Annual Michicagoan
The University of Chicago
Classics Hall (1010 E 59th St)
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FRIDAY, MAY 4

8–9am | Breakfast
9–10:30am | Panel 1—The Location of Regimentation & Revitalization

DISECUSSANT: Sonia Das (New York University)
Perry Wong (PhD student, Anthropology, UChicago) "Histories of the Language of Ritual Advice in Messamessa, Studies in Method"
Sharon Seegers (PhD student, Comparative Human Development, UChicago) "Finding Interpreters Who Can OPEN-HER MIND: How Deaf Teachers Select Sign Language Interpreters in Ha Noi, Vietnam"
Kristin Gee Hickman (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago) "Vernacular Language and the City" 
Cheryl Yee (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Did Jesus, Slap or Sokut for our Sins?" Language-use Among Cambodian Christians"

10:40am–12:30pm | Panel 2—Sense, Consensus & Consent

DISECUSSANT: Henry Parsons Dick (Arcadia University)
Prash Naikud (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Propriosociosom: Corporal Ministry and the Ethical Pedagogy of Balance in a Timor-Leste Fishing Hamlet"
Prome McIntyre (PhD student, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Heat Metaphors as Contact Tropes and Language Ideologies: Sensation and Socially Meet Attention and Autonomy"
Alannah Berson (MA’2017, Anthropology, UChicago) "Fucks: Control, Compromise, and Getting Off in an Era of Fifty Shades"

12:30–2pm | Lunch (Classics Hall, 1010 E 59th St)

2–3:45pm | Panel 3—Chaos in the Cosmos: Governance, Resistance & Social Coordination

DISECUSSANT: Jessica Greenberg (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)
Mosiek van Rheenen (PhD student, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Welcome Turks, We Spik Inglish": Scaling Linguistic Imperialism in Contemporary Indonesia
Natalya Czerniecki (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago) "Panicked Awareness: Rumors, Dangerous Foods, and the Public Call to Trust Oneself in Post-Soviet Tbilisi, Georgia"
Adrienne Lagman (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago) "An Affective Lens on Legal Risk and Responsibility Management in Corporate Shanghai"
Gripyor Gorban (PhD student, Anthropology, UChicago) "How Law Gained Its Value: A Short History of Linguistic Ideology amongst Soviet Lawyers"
Shenghe Lily Ye (PhD candidate, Comparative Human Development, UChicago) "Getting Reliable In and Out of the Lab"

Hirokazu Miyazaki (Professor of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Cornell University)

7pm | Student Dinner
(Classics Hall, 1010 E 59th St)

2023

SATURDAY, MAY 5

8–9am | Breakfast
9–10:30am | Panel 4—Stance-Taking & the Practice of Value

DISECUSSANT: Rana Gershon (Indiana University)
Jessica Loren (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Cullinon and the Limits of Situationally Emergent Ethics: A Model for Transcending Frame-crossing and Proximal Interactivity"
Owen Kohl (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago) and Faluca Enriquez (PhD’2014, Anthropology, UChicago) "Entertaining Selveds"
Britta Ingelbreton (PhD candidate, Anthropology and Linguistics, UChicago) "Can’t Even Read One Word: Literacy Practices in Rural China"
Jin Li (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Interpreting ‘Demon’: Violence and Non-violence Movements in a Tibetans Borders Community"

10:40am–12:30pm | Panel 5—Pastures: Time, History & Revitalization

DISECUSSANT: Kathryn Graber (Indiana University)
James Meader (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Where My Way Must Go: Moral Dissis and Martyr Virtues in the Suicide of Aja"
Shulan Sun (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago) "Demotic’s Trojan Horse: A Linguistic Anthropological Perspective on the Demotic Movement and the Greek Language Question"
Yukun Zeng (PhD student, Anthropology, UChicago) "The Semiotic Production of Alternativity: Value, Time, and the Un(actualizability) of the Duping Movement in China"
Georgia Emery (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Multilingual Chronotopes: Embodying Ancestral Time on Quichua Radio"

Eman M. Elshabbi (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago) "Arabic without Arabs: Golden Chronotopes and Straining Language Ideologies in the Discourses of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf"

12:30–2pm | Lunch (Classics Hall, 1010 E 59th St)

2–3:30pm | Panel 6—Script, Inscription & Scripting Authority

DISCUSSANT: E. Summerson Carr (UChicago)
Rajajvi Gandhi (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago) "Code Switching and Secondary Stress"
Robyn Taylor-Neu (PhD student, Anthropology, University of California—Berkeley) "Signature Moves"
Jay Schute (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago) "Doing Things with Nothing": Performing (Dis)order in South African Parliamentary Debate
Leah Le (PhD student, Anthropology, University of Michigan) "Unobstructed Words, Clear Minds, and a Developed Society: The Rheumatism of Total and Democratic: Society in Debates about Punctuation in Written Korean"

3:45–5:15pm | Panel 7—Mediated Voices & Problems of Circulation

DISECUSSANT: Adrienne Le (University of Waterloo, Ontario)
Kenzell Huggins (PhD student, Anthropology, UChicago) "Re(reading) Media Ideology In Singapore"
Christophor Blosch (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago) "The Great Priest and the Maya Quichua: Deciphering Humility and Humiliation in a Yakucacan Viral Video"
Wey Yang Soh (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago) "Much Indiscolltically, Such Recontextualisations: The Intenational Prototypes of Internet Memes in Singapore"

7pm | Dinner and Party
(Experimental Station, 6100 S Blackstone Ave)
“Histories of the Language of ‘Ritual Advice’ in Mesoamerica, Studies in Method”

Perry Wong (PhD student, Anthropology, UChicago)

Heeding Jakobson’s injunction that “Language must be investigated in all the variety of its functions” (1960), this presentation asks two questions: What might a multifunctional history of linguistic structure consist of? And what kinds of comparative methods might be required? Silverstein brings granular focus to the dynamic relation between language structure and linguistic ideology as dialectic process (1979), and it is this view toward dialectic process that serves as the theoretical point of departure. To illustrate the problems that motivate these questions, this presentation looks to one case: the language of (southern) highland Mesoamerican ‘ritual advice’ most typically associated with wedding procedures. Ritual advice is what might be called, after Neustupný (in Hymes 1968, 33-34), a Sprechbund phenomenon, common to a cultural “area” that includes communities speaking many distinct codes. For such ritual advice, while the “poetic” function is dominant—as with any ritual genre (Silverstein 2004)—the “conative” function (Jakobson 1960, 355) is also foregrounded. The empirical center of this presentation consists of three clusters of textual tokens of ritual advice, recorded in different languages and ranging spatiotemporally from the Early Colonial Period Valley of Mexico to contemporary highland Guatemala. This presentation suggests that a history of ritual advice as a poetic genre is a history of interactional event types seen through language and carried out in discourse, while a history turned toward the conative function is a social history of the relation between speaker and addressee as constituted through language structure.

Discussant: Sonia Das (Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, New York University)

“Finding Interpreters Who Can OPEN-THEIR-MIND’: How Deaf Teachers Select Sign Language Interpreters in Hà Nội, Việt Nam”

Sharon Seegers (PhD student, Comparative Human Development, UChicago)

Sign language interpreters work in contexts shaped by multiple, and often competing, language ideologies. Drawing on an ethnographic study of the Deaf-run Center for Teaching Sign Language in Hà Nội, Việt Nam, this paper explores how language ideologies shape political stakes of interpreting, and selection criterion Deaf community leaders use to identify potential interpreters. In Hà Nội, interpreters are often used by Deaf community leaders engaged in the political work of advocating for access to signed language. Thus, Hà Nội Sign Language (HNSL) interpreters must mediate the very interactions where ideologies surrounding sign language are invoked, contested, and (re)constructed. The majority of HNSL students, however, are hearing people who grew up in hearing families and often hold negative ideologies towards sign language. Thus, Deaf teachers at the CTSL focus on finding interpreters who can OPEN-[their]-MIND, disorienting themselves from hearing-centered ideologies and reorienting toward Deaf cultural norms. This talk explores how reorientation is indexed by interpreters changing the lexical terms they use for Deaf people, by asking Deaf people questions, and using facial expression to embody Deaf communicative norms.
“Vernacular Language and the City”

Kristin Gee Hickman (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago)

Over the last decade, Moroccans have witnessed parallel movements to "revalorize" (revaloriser) two objects that they supposedly hold in contempt: the city of Casablanca and colloquial Moroccan Arabic (Darija). At the level of the city, government officials have worked to revalorize Casablanca—the largest city in Morocco—through a new city brand, WeCasablanca, aimed at transforming Casablanca's image of their city from undesirable urban sprawl to a modern African cosmopolis. Similarly, at the level of language, pro-Darija activists have worked to revalorize Darija—the national vernacular—through standardization aimed at transforming a rough, undesirable dialect into a modern international language. While these two movements were officially unrelated, they shared an underlying investment in the idea that proper liberal subjectivity—both civic and linguistic—requires an explicit "valuing" of the self. Taking this ideology of "revalorisation" as a starting point, this paper looks at counter modes of (civic and linguistic) subjectivity that push back against these liberal projects of re-valuation. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with the Casablanca-based collective Jouk Attamthil Al Bidaoui ('The Casablancan Performance Ensemble') during their preparation for a Darija phone drag show, I look at how this group of young artists carefully cultivated unconventional relationships with Darija and the city of Casablanca that tightly intertwined affection with contempt. As I show, these unconventional relationships and the subjectivities they entailed were highly fragile and constantly on the verge of erasure precisely because of how they troubled dominant liberal regimes of value.

“Did Jesus Slap or Sokut for our Sins?: Language-use Among Cambodian Christians”

Cheryl Yin (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan)

The first Khmer (Cambodian) translation of the Bible was published in 1954. Because Cambodian society places emphasis on social hierarchy, the original translator incorporated the Khmer royal honorific register to refer to God/Jesus. This is commonly found in languages with honorific registers, such as Tongan (Philips 2007) and Korean (Cho 2008; Harkness 2015). When referring to God "speaking" or Jesus "dying," for example, we find niay bontul (to speak) and sokut (to die), royal vocabulary which differs from the standard register, niay and slap respectively. Since 1954, there has been debate over not only language and translation in the Bible, but also how Cambodian Christians must speak in church, particularly how they must speak to or about God. While many Christians continue to use the royal register to refer to God and Jesus, some appear to be shifting away from the royal register. I will unpack the debate surrounding Khmer language-use in church and in the Bible in order to understand the differing views on what it means to be Cambodian and Christian. How do Cambodians reflect their Christian identity through language? How might differing ideologies between members and churches inform language use? As data analysis is currently ongoing, I tentatively argue that Christian youths are experiencing social change and foreign influence that encourages ideals of democracy and equality. This, along with their interactions with foreign missionaries, may influence their decision to abandon the royal register, instead utilizing language that fosters and reflects a closer relationship with God.
01  “Propriosemiosis: Corporeal Mimicry and the Ethical Pedagogy of Balance in a Timor-Leste Fishing Hamlet”

Prash Naidu (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan)

How do people learn to keep their balance aboard fishing vessels in choppy waters? How does spatiotemporal awareness of the body shape ethical pedagogy?

This paper examines the ethical pedagogy of balance among the Mambai of Timor-Leste. Balancing has many associations for the Mambai, including bodily experience and metaphorical reasoning. The theme of balance is reinforced through sensory and embodied practices of proprioception, which play a substantial role in the formation of cultural and ethical subjects. Drawing from long-term fieldwork in a fishing hamlet in southwest Timor-Leste, I focus on proprioceptive semiosis—routinized linguistic and bodily practices in which senior fishers socialized juniors in keeping balance while fishing in choppy waters. During weekly fishing trips, juniors were tasked to mimic seniors’ bodily techniques, often with consequences: a loss of balance posed the threat of being swallowed by the sea, while juniors who clamored back into the boat were castigated before their peers for not cultivating an awareness of their body in relation to the boat and the waters. In considering these practices, this paper utilizes what I call “corporeal mimicry” to describe bodily techniques of balance both semiotically and phenomenologically. By drawing attention to patterned, embodied modes of mimicry, I ultimately argue that sensory perception and practices illuminate an ethical pedagogy of balance.

02  “Heat Metaphors as Contact Tropes and Language Ideologies: Sensation and Sociality Meet Attention and Autonomy”

Promise McEntire (PhD student, Anthropology, University of Michigan)

What role do bodily states play in the process of semiosis? And what does this have to do with semiotic ideologies, attention, and personhood? As ethnographers, how might we come to understand the ways embodied cognitive and social semiotic processes interact? In gossiping about particularly desirable and undesirable modes of sociality, my Burkinabé interlocutors used heat metaphors to draw connections between attentional habits, competence, and morality. A “hot” sociality—they told me—is one that is inattentive and insensitive, lacking self-control, and imposing and controlling. Its opposite is “imperturbability,” which entails a high degree of receptivity and equanimity while honoring others’ autonomy. The hot sociality makes others pay attention to themselves, while imperturbability indicates paying attention to oneself in relation to others. But why isn’t everyone who exhibits communicative behaviors characteristic of the “hot” sociality evaluated in the same way? My Burkinabé interlocutors’ use of “contact tropes” open up questions regarding sensations and construals of the quality of joint attention established between a signer and interpreter. As such, this paper explores the significance of semiotic ideologies about contact-making in understanding the role of bodily phenomena in organizing social phenomena.

03  “Fuck: Control, Compromise, and Getting Off in an Era of Fifty Shades”

Alannah Berson (MA’2017, Anthropology, UChicago)

This paper proposes to take seriously the media storm created by E. L. James’ trilogy of romantic erotica loosely inspired by BDSM and Twilight. The works blend a number of genres and as such, hail multiple publics and violate established gender and publishing norms. By examining not only media comments around the novels but also the actual content of the works, I explore the ways in which specific forms of sexuality and relationships are socially valued in a heteronormative matrix while other forms are taken up as deviant forms, the mocking of which reinscribes established social norms. Taking up the idea that discourses around sexuality are just as much about what is not said as what is said (Cameron and Kulick 2003), I suggest that media uptake of Fifty Shades as a symbol of societal sexual confusion and/or contradiction points not only to the oddity of the writing within the texts but also to tensions in interpreting verbal and non-verbal communication in the current socio-sexual matrix. The eroticism of power and control within heterosexual relationships in romance novels aimed at women is an apparent contradiction with debates around consent and female empowerment, but yet novels like the Fifty Shades trilogy remain popular and enjoyed. The longstanding trend suggests that elements of social conditioning around erotic topics and emotional labor maintains some forms of consistency.
Discussant: Jessica Greenberg (Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign)

2–3:45PM
PANEL 3—CHAOS IN THE COSMOS: GOVERNANCE, RESISTANCE, AND SOCIAL COORDINATION

FRIDAY, MAY 4

01

“Welcome Turis, We Spik Inglish’: Scaling Linguistic Imperialism in Contemporary Indonesia”
Moniek van Rheenen (PhD student, Anthropology, University of Michigan)

This paper analyzes politics of differentiation and unification through ideologies of language standardization and the values of modernity in Indonesian language policies and tourism. To illustrate these ideological projects of linguistic differentiation and unification of the nation-state and between the nation and state, I use scale-making to demonstrate how a state ideology of internal linguistic unity and external differentiation is predicated upon metrics of distance acting upon scales of value, geographic space, temporality, and identity. I argue that Indonesia’s “language law” restricting English in public spaces is imagined to protect Indonesian national language and identity, while the explicit fear of linguistic neocolonialism is visible in the threat of English domination. Nevertheless, Indonesia’s closed-door policy toward English is contradicted by violations of the law. I conduct a semiotic analysis on aberrant signage to demonstrate how it indexes a parallel ideology of Indonesia’s self-perceived place within international modernity, in which English is necessary for participation in global networks of education and tourism. I analyze the Indonesian Language for Foreigners program (BIPA) to argue that Indonesian language policy is an ideologizing process that reproduces hegemonic practices of Dutch imperialism. Relying on temporal deixis and ideological processes of recursion and erasure, I illustrate how BIPA circulates Bahasa Indonesia within these global networks and projects Bahasa Indonesia back onto the nation by suppressing the Papuan separatist movement and ‘modernizing’ Papua for tourism. As languages are objectified and circulated through global cultural flows and into divergent linguistic regimes of value, inequality is born. These linguistic hegemonies are reproduced in the institutionalization of modernization through educational practices that reinforce privilege and politicize how conflicting ideologies collide within spaces of socialization.

02

“Panicked Awareness: Rumors, Dangerous Foods, and the Public Call to Trust Oneself in Post-Soviet Tbilisi, Georgia”
Natalja Czarnecki (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago)

This paper discusses rumors about food dangers in post-Soviet Tbilisi, Georgia. I begin by distinguishing between different types of rumor that I observed during my fieldwork between 2013 and 2016. In many of these popular (non-expert) accounts of danger, Georgian human bodies are imagined in terms of geopolitical valuations and vulnerabilities; “Georgia” is positioned—through no choice of its own—as a site of global de-valuation, a place where dangerous forms of food commodities are carelessly if not perniciously directed: Radioactive fruits from tainted Ukrainian sites after Chernobyl, and Georgian-produced tomatoes imagined to be chemically-laden as a result of farmers made to use Turkish-developed seeds. I will then focus on popular rumors around “GMO” foods and some of the material forms of these rumors’ circulation. In contrast to the kinds of rumors introduced above, wherein food consumers are imagined to be exposed to possible objects of contamination through no choice of their own, rumors around genetically-modified foods, often understood as branded products of “western” (corporate) interests, are as much about geopolitical anxieties as they are about a form of anxiety around emergent practices and ideologies of “consumer choice” and “awareness.”
“An Affective Lens on Legal Risk and Responsibility Management in Corporate Shanghai”

Adrienne Lagman (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan)

Based on observations and recordings of participants in Human Resources (HR) training seminars at a boutique law firm in Shanghai, this paper linguistically explores the affective dimensions of legal and HR education regarding employment risks and responsibilities under the law. At stake is how the law as a sign of modernity and source of anxiety comes to be understood in practice by legal professionals and a growing, though little researched, segment of the Chinese population, urban white-collar workers. Modality and value take center stage, as a major component to these seminars is the creation of and interplay among short films, lectures, and small group interactive tasks where participants are tasked with sorting through the messy affective entanglements of topics like “Unlocking Employee Depression” and “Managing Employee Extreme Emergencies.” This paper walks through a role-playing exchange from one such workshop on “Employee Termination Negotiation” where HR professionals role play terminating an employee before a larger classroom audience. It asks how affective responses become framed and forestalled in negotiations about legal responsibility when participants calculate and manage legal risk. In other words, in what ways do participants invite emotions in and/or shut them out as they try to understand what the law means in this context? It argues that participants’ strategic use of affect in taking stances about legal risk and responsibility reflects particular anxieties about the nature of the law and directly impacts the way they dialogically build intersubjectivity and the outcomes they negotiate. This approach seeks to elucidate the affective dimension of the contested process by which legal risk and responsibility become a source of anxiety in a corporate setting as people struggle with rapid legal and social change.


Grigory Gorbun (PhD student, Anthropology, UChicago)

Throughout the 20th century, the attitude of Russian lawyers towards the object of their studies went through a series of drastic changes. The October revolution of 1917 put an end to the diversity of approaches to law of the Imperial period and established the hegemony of Marxism-Leninism that rendered law a secondary phenomenon dependent on “real” material relations of class struggle. The early Soviet scholars called law a part of superstructure, “legal form” that only expressed material relations, and expected a “withering away of all law” with the advance of communism. However, by the time of its fall, the Soviet Union was a highly legalized state with a set of developed legal codes, a pantheon of legal theoreticians, and hundreds of thousands of people graduating from law departments every year. Instead of “legal form,” late Soviet lawyers would talk about “legal actuality/reality”; the “withering away of law” disappeared from the historical horizon. Although still claiming Marxist legacy, Soviet law in practice adapted positive legal theory. In this paper, I will show how legal theories of language played an important role in this transformation of Soviet legal thought. Paying central attention to the work of the father of Russian legal linguistics, Alexander Ushakov, and his idea of legal stylistics, I will analyze the connections between the shift in the linguistic ideology of Soviet lawyers with the growing value they put in law.

“Getting Reliable In and Out of the Lab”

Shenghe Lily Ye (PhD candidate, Comparative Human Development, UChicago)

This talk concerns the process of achieving inter-observer reliability, or coming to “see” the “same thing.” “Getting reliable” is a necessary achievement to establish a meaningful evidentiary basis for the scientific knowledge produced by studies in many fields of social inquiry, especially those which seek to quantify often chaotic and nebulous human activities and behaviors. I present data from a group of observers, preparing to conduct observations of preschool classrooms. I tie in an analysis of the metasemiotic labor involved in these preparations with broader observations about the valuation of “hard” and “soft” sciences and the consequences of such valuation.
Intersectioning concurrent interactions, in which participants attend to multiple conversations simultaneously, is a common feature of natural discourse. At social gatherings and family dinners, on playgrounds and during class activities, individuals observe, acknowledge, and even cross in and out of distinct but co-occurring interactions. Whether such movement is experienced as intrusive (Goffman 1981) or welcomed as collaborative transformation (Egbert 1997), proximal interactivity offers information to speakers about their immediate environments (Goffman 1974). The act of attending to certain parallel interactions and participants and not others, indexes skill (Lemon 2013), strategy (Goffman 1974) and ethical stance (Goffman 1979; Goodwin 2002). However, existing methods for analyzing frame-crossing activity are limited. Conventional approaches treat proximal interactions as subordinate, as ambient distractions minimizable through improved recording technologies, private interviews, or lab studies. Taking up the relatively underdeveloped literature on cross-frame interaction, this paper explores how participants interpret, take up, and suppress proximal interaction. It presents a model for transcribing such activity. Specifically, it returns to previously presented, but now well developed, ethnographic material: a spontaneous meeting between female Christian anti-sex trafficking outreach volunteers (strip club missionaries) and a male strip club owner at a bar he owns in Detroit. During this encounter, he repeatedly expresses his desire for spiritual and moral improvement, which the missionaries affirm. Periodically, he turns away to interact with another set of participants with whom he appears to carry out a large illegal drug transaction. This discussion tracks how the missionaries and the owner cooperate to resolve ethical dissonance through gesture and attenuation.
“I Can’t Even Read One Word: Illiteracy Practices in Rural China”
Britta Ingebretson (PhD candidate, Anthropology and Linguistics, UChicago)

In this talk, I explore illiteracy as a value and strategy among elderly women in rural China. I show how strategic deployment of claims of illiteracy allows elderly women to conflate the inability to recognize written characters with an inability to “read” present cultural scripts. I show how illiteracy as a practice and as a trope is a site of contest over value systems between China’s present and its recent past. These regimes of value reflect political claims over how to imagine China’s potential possible futures and how to remember its recent past(s). This talk is based on fieldwork conducted in Huangshan, a small city in southern Anhui Province from 2013-2015.

“Interpreting ‘Demons’: Violence and Non-violence Movements in a Tibetan Buddhist Community”
Jin Li (PhD candidate, Anthropology, University of Michigan)

After the Chinese invasion in 1950, Tibetan groups faced the question of whether they should pursue violence as a form of resistance. One thing that concerned them was whether an armed resistance would be acceptable from a Buddhist point of view. General Buddhist ethics disavow killing, but tantric Buddhism asserts killing to be virtuous when it is deployed against demons (bdud). Moreover, tantric Buddhism explains “demons” as both inside and outside the human individual: both evil beings in the world and one’s own afflictions. Accordingly, “to kill demons” can be explained for Tibetans as an urge to kill the Chinese invaders, but also as an urge to purify the hatred that would mislead them into doing this violence. This paper examines how these contrasting Buddhist claims and their interrelationships influenced Tibetans’ choices in the nomadic county of Serta. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Serta was under the influence of large numbers of prophecies urging Tibetans to “kill demons.” Tibetan nomads, Chinese cadres, and two generations of Tibetan monks in Serta all interpreted prophecies in connection with the encounter, defining “demons” in various ways, with completely different social and political consequences. By tracking these interpretations and explaining how the mutual constitutions of ethical discourses and agents in this story depended on clarifications of linguistic values, this paper further calls attention to Buddhist ontology, which denies a line between subject and object. Representing this Buddhist story, at the ultimate level, faces the issue of how to represent a semiotics of nonduality.
Recent decades’ work on tense-aspect has done much to clarify the indexical ground of shared temporal orientation. Further attention to the indexical dimension of linguistic modality offers no less valuable insights into the social life of possibility and necessity. To this end, I sketch a popular analysis of modality that emphasizes its context-dependence. This kind of framework has wide-ranging applications in semiotic analyses of sociocultural value, particularly where value informs practical reasoning and action. One example comes from the work of philosopher Bernard Williams, a central interlocutor in recent anthropology of ethics. Against claims that the ancient Greeks had no ethics to speak of, Williams argues that Sophocles’ tragedy portraits its protagonist’s suicide. Closer scrutiny of Sophocles’ moral universe of Greek tragedy. One example comes from the work of philosopher Bernard Williams, a central interlocutor in recent anthropology of ethics. Against claims that the ancient Greeks had no ethics to speak of, Williams argues that Sophocles’ tragedy portrays its protagonist’s suicide. Closer scrutiny of Sophocles’ moral universe of Greek tragedy. At the broadest level, my project focuses on the “Greek Language Question” (to glossko zhtma), a dispute over which of the two language varieties—Demotic (dimotikí) or katharévousa—should be the official language of Modern Greece. I discuss the social-historical processes through which Demotic Greek, the written form of the Greek vernacular, become institutionalized as the official language of Greece since 1976, with the abolishment of katharévousa. By investigating the development of the Demoticist Movement since the late nineteenth century, I discuss the language standardizing efforts that had transformed and sedimented Demotic’s status, with a special interest on these actors and their discursive practices: university student activists, diasporic intellectuals, and literary writers. My project rests on two premises: 1) the institutionalization of Demotic as a process of enregisterment, and 2) the dispute as symptomatic of the processual production of alternativity (Mauss 2016[1925], Maurer 2005) between different modalities of value. The case under scrutiny is a literacy movement called Dujing that features repetitiously reading Confucian canons without understanding. The Dujing movement originated in Taiwan in the 1990s, but has since the 2000s gained popularity and sparked controversy in mainland China. Although its development is heavily intertwined with folk religions in Taiwan, Dujing appears to be an appealing alternative schooling option for Chinese parents, positioned against the mandatory, modern, and atheist education in the country. This paper addresses an entailment of the triangulation of value and modality: how different regimes of value co-exist or interact. The polysemic nature of value (Graeber 2001) grants value and modality: how different regimes of value co-exist or interact. The polysemic nature of value (Graeber 2001) grants different regimes of value co-exist or interact. The polysemic nature of value (Graeber 2001) grants this question both theoretical necessity and methodological slipperiness. This paper tries to avoid merely privileging ahistorical modalization of value (Postone 1996) by semiotically tracing the processual production of alternativity (Maurer 2016[1925]; Mauss 2016[1925]). This paper aims to draw on Dujing participants’ folk theorization of value to suggest how alternative regimes of value are possible, what the role of time is, and why we need a semiotics of metricalization and scaling to account for the un(actualizability) of value.

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For many people in Napo, Ecuador, the guayusa tea hour (wayusa upina) has come to be seen as one of the most significant and threatened cultural practices of Amazonian Quichua communities. Until relatively recently, families would rise at three or four in the morning, drink invigorating guayusa tea, share their dreams, relate mythic stories and personal narratives, and prepare to hunt or work in their gardens. Although similar morning routines continue in some contemporary homes, ongoing concern about cultural and linguistic change in Napo has led to the objectification and recontextualization of the wayusa upina as a frame for public cultural performances. This talk uses the guayusa tea hour as a site to explore the continuum between contemporary, lived practices and the performance of objectified ancestral practice. Through a discussion of three different realizations of the guayusa tea hour, I explore the semiotic emergence and enregisterment of a “reflected” chronotope from an “actual” chronotope of the world (Bakhtin 1981:253; Agha 2007). Grounded in a discussion of the guayusa hour as a didactic, live-broadcast event on local Quichua morning radio, I consider how a multimodal ancestral temporal frame is created, performed, and made available for recirculation during revitalization events. In doing so, I attend to the various semiotic resources through which time and space take on flesh in cultural performance.
“Arabic without Arabs: Golden Chronotopes and Stratifying Language Ideologies in the Discourses of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf”

Eman M. Elshaikh (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago)

This paper looks at the speeches, classes, and televised appearances of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (born Mark Hanson), one of the most prominent American Muslim leaders, and argues that his deployment of stratifying language ideologies is central to his cognitive authority and his role in the emergence of a liberal North American Muslim identity. It suggests that through highly ideological metalinguistic discourses, he is able to elevate the classical register of Arabic and its associated chronotopes while denigrating speakers of Arabic in the Arab world as those who have “compounded ignorance” of their own language. Such “ignorance” emerges historically, as Arabs become increasingly unable to overcome indexical contamination and engage with the language purely. In this way, Yusuf laminates values onto a polarized diglossic situation. The classical register and its knowers thus attain an unmarked voice (Bucholtz 2011, Silverstein 2013), creating the possibility of imagining classical Arabic as the voice of a racially flattened, globalized Muslim ‘ummah. By imagining Arabic in precisely this way, he creates the possibility for diasporic North American Muslims to imagine a pathway to liberal Muslim subjectivity through Arabic: an Arabic without Arabs.
This paper describes the results of an ethnographic study that I conducted in the months of January through March at a domestic violence support organization, Apna Ghar (‘Our Home’) based in the City of Chicago. The study examined the presence and effects of secondary stress in domestic violence counselors, and was carried out by the methodologies of interviewing the counselors, as well as observing their various work environments. My analysis is textual in nature, and examines the counselors’ code-switching from the first-person singular to the first-person collective while describing their work and its effects on their lives. By following these switches, I delineate the varying deictics that influence their opinions and behavior, and the way in which the former shapes their attitude towards stress. This methodological approach also highlights how the counselors ascribe value to the different influences that affect their work, and how those influences thereby shape their perception of “secondary trauma” and stress.

**“Code Switching and Secondary Stress”**

Rajasvi Gandhi (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago)

This paper engages the weaponization of metapragmatics in South African parliamentary debate on the part of upstart political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). It focuses on the mobilization of English language performatives like “calling points of order” during televised parliamentary debates. Such moments, I demonstrate, engender multi-lingual interactions that can become heated, even leading to physical confrontation. As a result, the EFF’s parliamentary presence has been described by many political analysts and casual observers alike as deliberately “disruptive” or “chaotic” degenerations of public order. The EFF’s regular invocation of “points of order” as a metapragmatic tactic—against speakers who “do not sound black [enough],” or to shame opposition speakers caught sleeping in parliament, ensures the EFF’s regular appearances in the South African mass media. For many, including ruling (ANC) and opposition party (DA) representatives, as well as many liberal analysts—the EFF’s political accent via the media, has been dismissed as purely the result of populist or even “fascist” appeal—lacking any political motivation beyond the explicit sabotage of public order and reckless perpetuation of the EFF brand. In engaging some of the concerns of Austinian language performativity, this paper presents an alternative to the dominant narrative of dysfunction through which the EFF’s relationship to South African mass-mediated political discourse has been described. It does so by revealing how the EFF’s parliamentary tactics—which simultaneously contest and invoke “order”—ultimately play a key role in maintaining quintessentially-local democratic possibilities of political order in post-Apartheid South Africa, and that this becomes possible precisely through strategic performances of (dis)order.

**“Doing Things with ‘Nothing’: Performing (Dis)order in South African Parliamentary Debate”**

Jay Schutte (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago)

This paper describes the results of an ethnographic study that I conducted in the months of January through March at a domestic violence support organization, Apna Ghar (‘Our Home’) based in the City of Chicago. The study examined the presence and effects of secondary stress in domestic violence counselors, and was carried out by the methodologies of interviewing the counselors, as well as observing their various work environments. My analysis is textual in nature, and examines the counselors’ code-switching from the first-person singular to the first-person collective while describing their work and its effects on their lives. By following these switches, I delineate the varying deictics that influence their opinions and behavior, and the way in which the former shapes their attitude towards stress. This methodological approach also highlights how the counselors ascribe value to the different influences that affect their work, and how those influences thereby shape their perception of “secondary trauma” and stress.

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**“Code Switching and Secondary Stress”**

Rajasvi Gandhi (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago)
A media ideology about Singapore has recurred fractally (Irvine and Gal 2000) across temporal periods and across spatio-political scales. At its broadest, this media ideology figures Singapore as a mediator in relation to external entities such as civilizations (i.e. East vs West), nation-states, and multinational corporations, which are seen as the producers and ultimate end-consumers. In this paper I trace four such instantiations of the fractural recurrence of this ideology across the following scales: global, regional, national, and subnational. In the national and subnational scales, a specific iteration of the ideology emerges, one that figures Singapore as a producer through the development of value in creative texts by placing various entities in close proximity to one another. This logic of proximity, especially seen in the technology park form of Mediapolis as an instantiation of baroque economy (Ong 2006), is a differentiated inflection of the ideology from the higher-level forms of the media ideology. In this paper I argue that this retooling of the media ideology as a means of transforming Singapore into a producer is possible because 1) the recursive fractals are always partial in their mimesis (Irvine and Gal 2000) and 2) any identification of a partial requires an attendant identification of a whole, in this case seen as the preceding oppositions in the fractal chain (Lemon 2017). Together, these processes open the possibility of the media ideology being refigured, but maintained, as Singapore attempts to shift its role in processes of mediatization.
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— Rachel Howard & Josh Babcock
Co-chairs, Michicagoan 2018

SATURDAY, MAY 5

03

“The Cruel Priest and the Maya Quinceañera: Deciphering Humility and Humiliation in a Yucatecan Viral Video”

Christopher Blochl (PhD candidate, Anthropology, UChicago)

A short video recorded in a Maya-speaking community in southern Yucatán went viral in 2015. The video clip showed a Catholic priest scolding and humiliating a teenage girl during a mass celebrating the girl’s quinceañera. The priest’s behavior sparked outrage and garnered considerable news coverage. This paper offers a semiotic analysis of the video and its circulation in mediatized discourse, which swept the video up into broader debates about sexual harassment, churchly authority, and the marginalization of indigenous people. For different publics, certain features of the mediatized text afforded particular interpretations and deterred others. The poor acoustic quality of the recording contrasted with the scandalous clarity of the video footage. Mexican Spanish speakers could not decode the priest’s Maya, but the meanings of the participants’ gestures and glances seemed obvious. So obvious, in fact, that construals of these non-linguistic signs shaped divergent Spanish translations of the opaque linguistic messages, which were then shared on the internet and reported in news articles. Notwithstanding these translational differences, public discourse about the event approached a general consensus, which articulated the value of the girl—as female, as humble, as Maya—and critically evaluated the priest’s flagrant disrespect of the girl and her family.

04

“Much Indexicality, Such Recontextualizations: The Intensional Prototypes of Internet Memes in Singapore”

Wee Yang Soh (MA student, Anthropology, UChicago)

Political Internet memes have become a recognised textual genre on their own in Singapore with their pervasiveness on popular Singaporean forums and social media websites. Their popularity as forms of protest is linked to governmental censorship in Singapore. To express and discuss their growing frustration with what is perceived as a distant and apathetic government, Singaporeans are limited to online platforms which are not censored but are closely monitored by the Singapore government. To avoid incurring an omniscient government, Singaporeans engage in “pragmatic resistance” a strategy to voice their resentment against the government while minimizing their liability under Singaporean law. However, I argue in this paper that their performative efficacy as protest instruments are limited by local linguistic ideologies of meme usage. For the meme as a textual sign in digital language, there are ingrained sets of expectations of what memes are and how they should be used in digital culture. Internet memes are enregistered as a semiotic form that indexically points to the specific type of communicative event in which it is used and the stereotypic characteristics of the “speakers” involved in that event. The indexical linkage of “political memes” with the “funny Internet meme” thus threatens the political meme with erasure, defeasing its very being as a political genre.
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