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9

Language, society, and history

Towards a unified approach?

Paja Faudree and Magnus Pharao Hansen

... language is the archives of history ...

(Ralph Waldo Emerson 2000: 236)

9.1 Introduction: The language–society–history nexus

It would be difficult today to find a scholar who would not insist on engaging cultural phenomena within historical frameworks. Language is of necessity implicated in such an endeavor given how tightly it is bound to culture through shared history, the two having “grown up together, constantly influencing each other” (Whorf 1956: 156). But what does such co-evolution mean for how we approach the field shared by language, culture, and history?

Linguistic anthropologists have dedicated considerable effort to exploring how understandings of the past are the result of semiotic processes in present micro-contexts of interaction. They have also examined how trajectories of past events lead to formations of semiotic complexes (idioms, institutions, ideologies, identities) that structure and define particular pasts while influencing the present as well. Yet while these two approaches have contributed enormously to our understanding of the causal and conditional relations between language and history in social contexts, they have remained largely distinct from each other. We suggest that researchers working at the intersection of language, society, and history would benefit from an approach that more fully integrates the insights of both lines of inquiry.

Greg Urban (1996) conceptualizes the creation of collective memory as a dialectical process through which the sensible world is made intelligible through discourse. In similar terms, we see signs of the past as sensible in the present, but intelligible only once embedded in narrative. Language is doubly implicated in this process. It is a sensible object that

can differentially serve as an index upon which to build our interpretations of the particular past that brought the present into being, and it is the medium in which those interpretive narratives are built. In engaging the language–society–history nexus, different ribbons of thought have tended to focus either on producing historical narratives (history) or on analyzing such historical production (metahistory). We take this division as a basis for our review of the literature, which is structured into two parts:

- (1) *Metahistory: Language and the social life of history in the present.* Scholars working in this vein focus on how language produces and circulates distinct histories, understood as narratives through which the past becomes socially meaningful. Such work attends to how, through language use, particular linguistic-cultural forms become linked to selective, ideological awareness of the ties between past and present. A dominant question concerns the processes by which societies become aware of their pasts and use discourses about it to shape present norms and future paths.
- (2) *History: Understanding the past through language.* Scholars working within this tradition study past events and meanings through linguistic signs available in the present. Such research involves examining different kinds of linguistic traces representing past forms of sociality within specific historical contexts. A driving question concerns how sociocultural change becomes “artifactualized” through and within language, and how such sedimentation processes can be reflexively understood as a dialectical process through which languages and societies jointly evolve.

By thus dividing our review we aim to show that each approach relies crucially on the other. Our main argument is that any engagement with the language–society–history nexus is best served by engaging both with how the past is sensible to us and how we make it intelligible through metahistory. Drawing on a combination of empirical analysis of the traces of the past as well as metahistorical analysis of how these indexes are narrativized, such a dialogue promises a deeper understanding of the language–society–history nexus. We argue that linguistic anthropology is uniquely positioned to approach this field holistically, by analyzing the recursive semiotic processes tying peoples, narratives, and events together over time.

Our approach is based on the premise that the object of analysis is itself unified: the seemingly discrete concepts “culture” (or “society”), “history,” and “language” are all constructions dependent upon relations among sets of signs, but are also simultaneously trajectories of sign relations that shift over time. The object’s fundamental unity is evident in how language and history selectively become the targets of collective awareness and collective interventions to control them through semiotic processes. Languages

are constructed as bounded, identifiable, standardized objects through discourse patterns that emerge and are stabilized in particular historical contexts, just as societies become selectively aware of their histories through particular events and their subsequent linguistic-discursive construction. The dialectical interaction of such past events and (narrative) constructions of the past in turn shape relations between peoples and sign systems in the present. This entire recursive process fundamentally depends upon relations among signs, temporal frames, and forms of sociality within a politically charged field of selective awareness.

9.2 The language–society–history nexus and the development of linguistic anthropology

Before the formal founding of disciplines, thinkers as diverse as Rousseau, Herder, Humboldt, and Nietzsche approached the language–society–history nexus holistically. With the rise of institutionalized disciplines, foci emerged that carved out bounded fields with distinct methods and theories geared towards investigating discrete empirical objects. Initially, history and anthropology shared the goal of understanding the history of humanity, but history privileged textual analysis while anthropology stressed comparative ethnology. This division of labor persisted in European anthropology until Radcliffe-Brown and later Levi-Strauss turned anthropology towards the synchronic study of social structures. As Saussure's synchronicity/diachronicity distinction evolved into Bloomfieldian structuralism and Chomskyan generativism, the historical study of language became severed from synchronic linguistics, which became linguistics proper. As each discipline continued refining its distinct object of study, its practitioners gave less attention to processes transecting the boundaries among language, history, and society.

Exceptions to this general tendency were found in Prague school linguistics, which continued to stress the need to study linguistic structure and change together and in relation to communicative functions. American Boasian anthropology also insisted that linguistic-cultural complexes are the result of historical trajectories recoverable through synthetic attention to ethnographic, archaeological, and linguistic evidence. These schools – through the intellectual legacies of Boas, Sapir, Jakobson, Benveniste, and others – provide much of the theoretical and methodological foundations of contemporary linguistic anthropology. While synchronic generative linguistics continues to have a strong position in the US, linguistic research elsewhere – tracing its genealogy to Prague school functionalism – studies language typology in a framework of grammaticalization, wherein synchronic structure is shaped by social interactions over time. Nonetheless, many anthropologists, including linguistic anthropologists, equate linguistics as a discipline with Chomsky's

ahistorical, generative approach – a narrative producing lasting estrangement between linguistics and anthropology.

Another set of exceptions, deriving from historical materialist theory, focused on processes of social differentiation. Such approaches include history's *Annales* school and the sociolinguistics of Gumperz and Labov. In anthropology, historical materialism shaped political economy and world systems approaches – work by Wolf, Mintz, Wallerstein, and others – and the anti-colonial movement subverting the myth of the “ethnographic present” (Fabian 1983). This focus also broke with the tendency to view texts as the only valid object of historical knowledge, a bias circumscribing oral cultures as “people without history” (Wolf 2010[1982]). Though such approaches have created a robust tradition in anthropology of studying culture and history jointly (e.g., the work of Dirks, Sahlins, Stoler, Trouillot, and others), they have paid scant attention to language.

Drawing on these legacies, linguistic anthropology has led the study of language in social context. The field examines how sign complexes move through social space and time by synthesizing an eclectic set of concepts and perspectives from diverse theoretical frameworks: Peircean pragmatic semiotics, ordinary language philosophy, Bakhtinian literary theory, Bourdieuan practice theory, and various post-structural approaches to discourse and textuality. Yet while theories of relations between language and society, and between society and history, have been well developed, the relation between language and history has been less theorized. Linguistic anthropology has more fully theorized the intersection of semiotics and temporality (e.g., Parmentier 1987, 1994, 2007; Silverstein 1993; Urban 1996; Inoue 2004; Agha 2007; Lempert and Perrino 2007; Hanks 2010; Monaghan 2011; Faudree 2012). But even here, linguistic anthropologists have frequently engaged lightly with history *per se*, focusing on describing semiotic events and processes in synchronic social time rather than describing how they unfold embedded in broader historical trajectories and specific historical contexts, which often remains categorized as the domain of the discipline of history. In other words, the history of linguistic anthropology itself – understood both as its conceptual genealogy and socially held narratives about those origins – continues to shape how we approach the language–society–history nexus.

9.3 Metahistory: Language and the social life of history in the present

What is the purpose of history? Answering this question depends, first, on distinguishing it from other temporal scales and indicating why it is a privileged site of analysis. In our view, history is unique in surveying change over time not by examining the emergence of the capacity for social conventions (i.e., phylogeny; see Levinson, this volume,

Chapter 12, and Enfield, this volume, Chapter 13) or variations in instantiations of conventions (as interaction); rather, history pertains to changes in conventions themselves. Thus for linguistic anthropologists, attention to changing conventions also means examining how people produce and circulate histories about those changes, how they take evaluative and affective stances towards them, and how people subjectively experience history – and how language use is involved in these other processes. Histories provide explanations of causal relations between past and present; as meaning-making tools, they explain, motivate, and justify a range of present social categories. Language in turn plays a critical role in establishing narratives connecting people to the past: language is a product of history, and language structure and pragmatic norms are the sediments of past discourse and interactional patterns. Language is, furthermore, the medium through which history is transmitted, through which collective pasts are narratively positioned against the present. Even when collective memory is invested in material objects as crucial signifiers of the past, their social meanings are shared through narratives. Languages, too, may be taken as signs of group history: evidence of their passage through time is embedded in linguistic structure itself as well as in key lexemes indexing particular histories. Through metalinguistic discourses and language ideologies, languages become signs of particular pasts and tools for their interpretation in the present.

Linguistic anthropologists have tended to engage these issues by asking how traces of the past become evidence, critically examining social processes that produce and circulate historical narratives. This approach shares some interests with the vast, influential body of work in science and technology studies interrogating the making of facts, including some working at the intersection with history (e.g., Abu El Haj 2002). Linguistic anthropologists working on fact-making over time have focused on the social life of history: the meanings people make of the past and the layered social processes by which those meanings are invested with authority and put into circulation. They have less often focused on history itself: a past interpretable if not fully knowable through the analysis of interactions among people, events, and signs, particularly linguistic ones.

9.3.1 Textuality, interdiscursivity, and history

A diverse range of social theorists – including Ricoeur, Derrida, Kristeva, and Geertz – have privileged textual models for cultural interpretation. They have variously advocated viewing social formations as assemblages of texts that stand in contextual and intertextual relations to each other through time and space. Linguistic anthropologists have critiqued such culture-as-text approaches for not distinguishing between the text and the “text-artifact” – the text as physical object – and for isolating both from contexts of use while blurring the relations between discursive flows and

social processes (Silverstein and Urban 1996; see also Bauman and Briggs 2003). Thus some linguistic anthropologists have foregrounded relations among discourses through attention to interdiscursivity (e.g., Silverstein 2005), which foregrounds relations among distinct discursive events. This approach reframes attention to text, integrating it into ethnographic analysis of the dynamic, diachronic processes by which discourses become entextualized and stabilized over time, facilitating connections among events through ongoing processes of recontextualization.

In linguistic anthropology, such work has focused on the social and political processes by which discourses become entextualized into discrete, manipulable “texts” whose meaning may shift when recontextualized. Urban (1996, 2001) identifies power relations and ideologies of textual authority as critical to replication, key factors “escalating” the circulatory processes through which “culture moves through the world.” In the production of history, entextualization produces selective memory: by understanding why people voice one historical text rather than another, history can be seen as a generative process influenced by social and political forces. In her study (1995) of the circulation of history among the Brazilian Xavante, Graham describes how Xavante historical discourses are entextualized in specific discourse genres that differentially lend authority to specific narratives of the past even as they are reconfigured to fit new social circumstances. Other approaches have likewise privileged genre as a unique site where friction between past uses and present needs produces “interdiscursive gaps” that make history selectively visible to participants or analysts (Bauman 2004; Hill 2005; Agha 2007; Hanks 2010; Wirtz 2007).

Yet while broadly generative, this focus on the social dynamics of textuality has also proven limiting. Highlighting the iterative, potentially endless process of (re)entextualization and (re)contextualization runs the risk of producing a mechanism-driven grasp of change over time, constrained in its ability to account for how specific historical circumstances and actors are linked to change. History can become reduced to an inferred temporal trajectory, a narrative of movement through time that harnesses discrete textual events together rather than accounting for how such events, and their surrounding contexts, are wrapped up in broader historical processes.

9.3.2 Mediation, collective memory, and semiotic technologies

One solution involves stressing materiality more fully by focusing on how different semiotic technologies (see Agha 2011, Kockelman and Bernstein 2012) are linked to historical processes: how history becomes attached to and transmitted through particular objects such as texts and other material “artifacts.” Parmentier has been a leading proponent of examining how semiotic processes mediate between past and present. He

distinguishes “signs of history” from “signs in history” (Parmentier 1987). These two concepts analytically separate signs that are taken as referential symbols of “History” (particular “folk” narratives about the past) from relatively indexical signs embedded within the sequence of historical events as they unfold over time. The former concept, “signs of history,” isolates objects that some group conventionally, explicitly takes to be signs of the past (e.g., an ancient abandoned ruin as a sign of collective history). In contrast, the latter concept stresses the way signs function not only as representations of history but as active signifiers producing historical meaning in the present (e.g., an ancient building taken as a site of political activity whose present meaning is harnessed to the historical resonance of the specific venue). Parmentier’s work thus helps elucidate how materiality is implicated in the semiotic construction of history in the present.

A more commonly used framework for studying materiality and historicity has been Halbwach’s concept of “collective memory,” used by archaeologists and others to understand practices through which peoples manipulate their environment, creating shared interpretations of the past while investing them in public objects (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). An evolving trend in archaeology uses semiotic approaches to understand relations between materiality and discourse in past contexts (Alcock 2001, Abu El Haj 2002, Preucel 2006; Crossland 2009). Though archaeologists are only sometimes explicit about their linguistic underpinnings, processes by which material objects become representations of collective memory are necessarily both intersubjective and discursive, reliant upon multiple kinds of communicative events ranging from planning work prior to construction of major projects like monuments to collaboration during their construction stages to building consensus about post-completion use. Work in linguistic anthropology has been more consistently explicit in elucidating how the material world is bound, through discursive practices, to the construction of collective memory. A primary example is Basso’s (1996) analysis of Western Apache place names, which describes how places become tied through narrative to history: landscapes become representations both of the past and of the meaning history holds in the present.

Linguistic anthropologists have also approached the language–society–history nexus by analyzing how developments in media technology drive historical, social, and linguistic processes. This approach is heavily influenced by thinkers ranging from Frankfurt School theorists to scholars like Anderson and Habermas who place media and publicity at the center of their theories of social history. Their emphasis on literacy and print has stimulated much research in linguistic anthropology (e.g., Besnier 1995, Eisenlohr 2007, Miller 2007, Faudree 2013). A parallel interest in cross-cultural meanings of literacy – particularly in non-Western media such as khipus, codices, hieroglyphs, and non-alphabetic scripts – has been of

concern both to ethnohistorians and linguistic anthropologists attending to past and present in the same society (Jansen 1990, Boone and Mignolo 1994, Restall 1997a, 1997b, Makihara 2001, Salomon 2001 and 2004, Quilter and Urton 2002, Urton 2003, Houston 2004 and 2008, Tomlinson 2009, Boone and Urton 2011, Rappaport and Cummins 2011). Such work necessarily engages with how particular media selectively interact with particular languages as they encode narratives about the past (see also Gershon and Manning, this volume, Chapter 22).

A methodological conundrum faced by scholars extracting historical narratives from material artifacts is that even in attention to written texts, semiotic analysis requires making assumptions about the linkage of such signs to narratives in the past and the present. This requires approximating the indexical ground from which a given artifact was produced: deciphering the artifact's meaning by (re)constructing the narrative binding it to its surrounding context of use and interpretation. This endeavor requires the scholar to produce a rich image of the past based on as many sources of knowledge (signs of the past) as possible, but also requires a semiotically adequate theory of narrative and high levels of reflexivity about how artifacts are emplotted into past and present narratives.

9.3.3 Dialogicality and the chronotope: Bakhtinian approaches

Mikhail Bakhtin developed just such a theory of the narrative, and his work has given linguistic anthropologists unique tools for studying the language–society–history nexus. One of Bakhtin's fundamental insights is that language in its natural state is infinitely various, meaning every utterance is polyphonous and resounds with multiple voices. Furthermore, present utterances always exist in a complex relationship with past ones: present utterances are always a partial revoicing of past ones, their voices echoing those of the near and distant past. The dialogicality inherent in Bakhtin's vision is what brings some linguistic anthropologists to view culture as emerging out of dialogic interaction (e.g., Tedlock and Mannheim 1995). This view implies that likewise history is constructed dialogically, as are narratives about particular histories. Applying a dialogic lens to understanding the past foregrounds the creative role that language in dialogic interaction plays in constructing histories and narratives about them, while stressing the emergent, contingent, relative nature of historical processes as they take place.

Recent work has taken up Bakhtin's *chronotope*, a concept directly relevant to theorizing the language–society–history nexus given its explicit invocation of temporality. For Bakhtin, all semiotic endeavors – events through which social meaning is constructed – depend on the chronotope: “every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (1981: 258). Bakhtin described the chronotope as

the force by which time “thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible,” and through which “space becomes charged and responsive to movements of time, plot and history” (1981: 84). Chronotopes are narrative frameworks that recruit and emplot particular social personae (“characters”), creating them through dialogic, interdiscursive interaction. One research trend has emphasized how speakers in interaction establish alignments with particular narrative chronotopes that frame the speech event, generating “cross-chronotope” alignments as interlocutors calibrate the chronotope of the interaction with the shared narrative chronotope (Irvine 2004, Silverstein 2005, Lempert 2007, Agha 2007, Lempert and Perrino 2007, Perrino 2007, Dick 2010). Recent work has also shown how individuals build identities through autobiographical narratives, constructions through which speakers situate themselves in relation to visions of the past. Though scholars have long found narrative a crucial tool through which selves are constructed, the chronotope concept adds new dimensions by foregrounding not only the spatial, temporal, and linguistic aspects of such narratives but also their contextual specificity. For example, Schiffrin (2009) stresses that while narratives promise access to intimate, almost private imaginations of (personal) history they also draw on highly public, collectively shared discursive frameworks. Thus such narratives situate entire discourse communities temporally and socio-politically. In discussing “enregistered memory,” Wirtz (2007) considers how narratives may be at once autobiographical and social, indexing shared interpretations of the past: the mere use of the register situates the speech event within a specific chronotopic narrative frame.

The chronotope concept is itself the product of a chronotope, of course, and arises out of a particular narrative interpretation within a specific spatio-historical context. Hence one problem in adapting the concept for present use is how to preserve its utility while shedding limitations born of its genesis in literary criticism. By putting texts at the center of analysis, studies relying on the chronotope risk neglecting those aspects of social life that less obviously formulate collective interpretations of the past by engaging with textuality. Yet when the key Bakhtinian insight – that language in use, hence social process, is fundamentally heteroglossic – is turned towards understanding interconnections among language, society, and history, the theory offers a framework capable of synthesizing relatively positivist and relatively representationalist approaches, thereby uniting history and metahistory. Using chronotopes as an organizational theoretical concept allows positivist and representationalist methods to become distinct yet relatable strategies, each dependent upon marshaling particular voices in constructing narrative explanations. A Bakhtinian framework thus produces not just a multi-vocal but a multi-epistemic reading of history and its social meaning.

By foregrounding narrative as productive of both meaning and material realities, the chronotope concept offers new possibilities for reflexive

scholarship by encouraging scholars to think critically about their own processes of using narrative to engage with the past. In other words, the concept activates a range of productive questions: What is the genealogy of the particular chronotope in question? What is its field of use? How is it transmitted? How did it come to have the status it does, whether hegemonic, institutionalized, subaltern, or suppressed? What are the interactional dynamics in play, from the kinds of interactions the chronotope facilitates to those it prohibits? What other chronotopes is it interacting with? Such questions could be equally addressed to past contexts, present contexts, or scholars' own contexts of text production.

9.3.4 Ideologies of language, time, and history

Over the last two decades, language ideology has been and continues to be a dominant focus in linguistic anthropology. Research elucidating dimensions of the language–society–history nexus has likewise used the concept. One such line of work stresses how entire linguistic codes are read ideologically, as signs of a collective past. These interpretations are subject to further metalinguistic evaluations that influence language change and the ways speakers make ideological linkages between languages and other social entities, whether values, practices, objects, places, or historical eras. Such approaches have been especially widespread among linguistic anthropologists studying processes of language shift and language revitalization (e.g., Kulick 1992, Kroskrity 1993, Woolard 2004 and 2008, Eisenlohr 2007, Errington 2008, Perrino 2011, Stasch 2011, Meek 2011).

Irvine and Gal's work (2000) has been a foundational text for research stressing language ideology, introducing three macro-semiotic processes widely used in elucidating interactions over time among language ideologies, forms, and practices. They are *erasure* (some differences are ideologically muted or silenced, thereby erasing systematic differentiation, while corresponding equivalences are stressed), *fractal recursivity* (patterns of interpretation are repeated at different scales within a semiotic system, as when linguistic distinctions are projected onto social ones or vice versa), and *iconization* (iconic linkages are established between group identities and semiotic forms so that each becomes a direct, naturalized representation of the other). In addition to spawning these widely generative concepts, Irvine and Gal's work offered a model for how they can be used to understand historical pasts and their meaning in the present.

Other approaches have explored ideologies through attention to how they mediate linkages among conceptualizations of time and linguistic and social practices. Whorf's (1956) analysis of Hopi as lacking grammatical tense was foundational to this line of research, sparking cross-disciplinary inquiry into how languages differentially encode time and what implications such differences might have not only for cross-cultural understandings of time and history but for the social practices by which

both are interpreted. Work critiquing Whorf's controversial argument has provided a wealth of data about how the Hopi language is tied to ideologies of time and history, yet disciplinary segregation has hampered a comprehensive synthesis. This problem is structural and thus exemplifies systemic deformations across myriad cases in existing scholarly literature – limitations that the holistic approach we advocate is designed to redress. Malotki (1983) describes in great detail the linguistic structures of Hopi temporal expression, but he divorces linguistic data from information about social context. Geertz (1994) provides a detailed account of how Hopi ideologies about prophesy and history have shaped Hopi social movements and historical events but pays little attention to the role of language or linguistic ideologies in these processes. Dinwoodie's (2006) brief study comes closest to integrating these strands of research by showing how multiple Hopi ideologies of time and language coexist and influence how individual Hopi people experience both conceptual fields. This work suggests how linguistic anthropologists might successfully take divergent views on a single case that might otherwise remain separated along disciplinary lines and fuse them into a rich, parallax interpretation. Indeed, one great advantage of examining history through a focus on language ideology is that the approach has sometimes successfully integrated study of historical pasts with analysis of the meaning made of those pasts in the present. At its best, emphasis on language ideology is accompanied by equally serious attention to, first, linguistic structure and social context and, second, to historical context consisting both of what we know of particular historical pasts as well as the meanings people have made of those pasts.

9.4 History: Understanding the past through language

If linguistic anthropologists have tended to understand history ethnographically, by looking at the social meanings people make of it, historians have tended to engage with history not only by asking what purpose history serves but also what methods provide the best route towards answering that question. This inquiry raises more questions about the role of empirical evidence in historiography. Should pieces of evidence be read as indexical signs of a past that is, however partially, essentially knowable, as history? Or should they be understood as signs from which narratives about the past – metahistories – are constructed, through political processes that have entextualized such narratives in particular ways? These teleological differences also align with different approaches towards how language is used to understand the past. Linguistic signs and structures may be used largely referentially, to infer facts about past events; or they may be viewed largely indexically as pieces in a vast complex of possible records of historical events whose importance lies

less in the information they convey about those events than in how they have been used to construct particular narratives about them. Here we argue that these two approaches are complementary, and both must be engaged in order to achieve a full grasp of the language–society–history nexus.

9.4.1 Historical linguistics and the comparative method

Comparative historical linguistics has been a primary field in which language, culture, and history have been united analytically. It emerged in the early nineteenth century alongside theories of evolution and modern ethno-nationalism; all three shared an interest in tracking movements and relations among past ethnic groups. The synthesis of ethnology, archaeology, and historical linguistics provided the basis for Boasian anthropology, which was groundbreaking in maintaining that cultural and historical sources of evidence could be combined to provide the histories of indigenous groups for which no textual histories existed (see Sapir 1916). Such work has been criticized for its colonial and modernist trappings whereby the scientific study of non-Western languages became a means of appropriating the pasts of colonized peoples, a process proceeding alongside the creation of narratives of civilizational decay and their incorporation into a universalizing Eurocentric ideology of history (Bauman and Briggs 2003, Errington 2008). This disciplinary history remains a legacy in the present, evident in the ongoing preoccupation in comparative historical linguistics with constructing language taxonomies, reconstructing proto-languages, finding their homelands, tracking population movements, and constructing a total picture of “what actually happened” (see, e.g., Campbell 1998). Such projects risk reifying languages, cultures, and populations as isomorphic, natural kinds. The relative lack of political and theoretical reflexivity in historical linguistics has contributed to enduring estrangement between that discipline and linguistic anthropology.

Research on Mesoamerica exemplifies these tensions. Knowledge of the region’s pre-contact past rests almost entirely on historical linguistic and archaeological evidence, upon which histories of migrations, flows of cultural innovations, and genealogies of civilizational centers have been tracked. With the notable exception of the classic Maya period, the absence of legible textual evidence means that archaeological remains are frequently coupled to narratives of large-scale movements of ethno-linguistic groups constructed by comparative linguists, fitting material remains into larger cultural-historical narratives. The construction of these narratives is sometimes characterized by a relative lack of reflexivity born of faith in the rigorous application of comparative method. Scholars working with the region’s languages sometimes place particular ethno-linguistic groupings in whose language-histories they specialize at the

center of the historical narratives they construct, whether speakers of Mayan (e.g., Coe 1968, Reilly 1991), Mixe-Zoquean and Oto-Manguean (Campbell and Kaufman 1976, Kaufman and Justeson 2009), or Uto-Aztecan languages (Hill 2001). This makes it nearly impossible for non-experts to objectively decide which narrative is more compelling, while the choice of one narrative over another may have unpredictable political ramifications for present indigenous peoples, thus raising the stakes for privileging one narrative over the other. Furthermore, such studies' contribution to the complex understanding of past discourse forms is frequently limited by the practice among historical linguists of taking isolated "culture words" and their referential meanings as primary analytic objects, rather than studying relations among past forms of discourse and grammatical structuration. Such shortcomings have kept many linguistic anthropologists, to the detriment of both disciplines, from engaging with comparative historical linguistic method and the types of knowledge it produces.

While the lexicographic approach to historical linguistics remains active, particularly where tied to archaeological and population genetic approaches to the deep past, the growing importance of grammaticalization theory has enabled historically-minded linguists to better address the processes by which linguistic structures are shaped by use over time (but see Campbell and Janda 2000 for a critical perspective). The grammaticalization perspective provides a fundamentally semiotic, dialectical understanding of processes through which discourse patterns sediment over time into linguistic structure. One important line of research involves examining the grammatical and structural effects of contact among linguistic groups (whether ethnic groups, regional populations, or social classes) as a potent catalyst for linguistic (and cultural) change (e.g., Thomason and Kaufman 1988, Labov 1994–2010, Harris and Campbell 1995, Thomason 1999, Matras 2009, Trudgill 2010). However, most historically oriented studies of grammaticalization assume that observable grammatical changes are caused by changing discourse patterns, finding the motivation for such change in presumed pragmatic universals. They usually stop short of analyzing how change relates to historically specific communicative contexts aligned with particular discourse genres, expressive media, and historical events. This is an arena where the tools and interests of linguistic anthropology might make important contributions. A promising example of such work is research on "ethnosyntax" (Enfield 2002).

A number of studies deserve special mention as exemplary syntheses of historical linguistic methods and anthropological concern for social context. Evans' (2003) study of kinship practices, discourse patterns, and kinship terms in indigenous Australia shows how processes of grammaticalization in the domain of kinship terms align with historical shifts in the social practices by which relatedness was organized in indigenous

societies (see also Blythe 2013). Canger (2011) uses historical linguistic tools to argue, based on years of research into Nahuatl dialectology, that the Classical Nahuatl language of colonial documentary sources is best understood as a koineized urban variety with roots in divergent dialect areas – a reading of the past with great ramifications for Mesoamerican colonial history. Kroskrity (1993) shows how the influx of loanwords into Tewa has been conditioned by changing language ideologies and contexts of interaction between the Tewa and their neighbors over time. Irvine and Gal (2000) examine language structures (the phonemic inventories of Nguni languages), linguistic practices (the use of taboo registers), and particular language ideologies (conceptualizations of how speech should be used to mark social distance and proximity) to understand specific pre-colonial histories of southern Africa. Tuite (2006) stresses that viewing historical linguistics as a fundamentally interpretive rather than fact-seeking endeavor would foreground its narrative-constructing role, thereby bringing it in line with anthropological tendencies to take a reflexive stance towards the narratives we construct.

Thus when joined to nuanced understandings of relationships between communities and linguistic patterns, comparative historical linguistic research can produce results harmonious with anthropological inquiry into language, society, and history. At the same time, that field's methodological and theoretical orientations can encourage a level of attention to historical specificity often lacking in linguistic anthropological work.

9.4.2 Ethnohistorical approaches

Ethnohistory – understood as study of the histories of indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, marginalized genders or classes, and other groups of peoples whose perspectives are underrepresented in official narratives of history backed by (national) institutions of power – is a field where attention to language has been employed successfully to construct complex pictures of past sociality. The field differentially integrates methods and theories from a diverse set of disciplines, including social history, historical linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and critical theory.

One such synthesis has been the rationalist empiricist framework exemplified by the New Philology school, centered around the work of Lockhart and his students (see Restall 2003 for a cogent overview). Drawing on insights from historical sociolinguistics, these scholars have asked how linguistic micro-variations in minority-language historical documents fit into larger historical patterns. New Philology developed out of research on colonial Mesoamerica, a region with abundant indigenously produced documents, though it has also influenced scholarship of other regions such as the Andes (see Durston's 2008 comparison of ethnohistorical research in the two regions). New Philologists pay special attention to documents Lockhart termed “mundane” that prior to his influence were

rarely studied, such as testaments (Kellogg and Restall 1998, Pizzigoni 2007), land documents (Wood 2003), and local government records (Haskett 1991, Lockhart 1992 and 1993, Terraciano 2001, Terraciano *et al.* 2005). Such analysis involves tracking the individual lives and concrete events documented in the sources, an approach facilitating narratives stressing disparity between the subjective experiences of the colonized and the colonizers as documented differentially in the texts produced by each group – what Lockhart (1999, 2007) has called “double mistaken identity.” This perspective can be used to rethink both indigenous and Spanish perspectives on life under colonial rule, troubling narratives that divide the colonial social world along easy dichotomies between Spanish conquistadors and indigenous victims (e.g., Matthew and Oudijk 2007, Yannakakis 2008).

A different approach claimed influences from post-modernism and critical theory, exemplified most clearly by the post-colonial and subaltern study groups of South Asia and Latin America (e.g., Spivak 1988, Mignolo 1992; see Van Young 2004 for a critical assessment of this and the New Philology, and Lockhart 2007 for an equally critical rebuttal from the New Philology perspective). Whereas the philological tradition aims to uncover the past realities out of which the texts they study were produced, critical approaches examine texts to understand how they reproduce ideological visions of those past realities. Like the New Philology, Subaltern and other post-colonial approaches to history employ sophisticated engagement with language but approach language with a different set of theoretical questions, in turn choosing and handling their historical sources differently. Drawing on theorists that explore relations between power and discourse – Nietzsche, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Derrida, and above all Foucault – these scholars have generated methodologies and concepts widely used across the human sciences. Scholars working from this approach engage with the workings of power through attention to how hegemonic ideas – particular linguistic and textual ideologies – are implicated in the performance and institutionalization of power relations. Such research focuses on discourse and discursive formations rather than specific linguistic structures, as well as on genealogies: lines of descent and inheritance through which discursive constructions in the present were born and came to have the meaning they do. Language is engaged primarily through such concepts as performativity and discourse, and rarely through linguistic structure. Work in this vein often focuses on the textual production of power by colonial authorities (e.g., Rabasa 2010, 2011), stressing how these and other historical colonial practices have left a legacy of oppression that must be addressed in the present.

Several scholars have joined interest in the discursive performance of power with linguistic and metalinguistic analysis of sources produced by colonial agents in the languages of empire. Errington’s (2008) work on

colonial linguistics is a prime example: his critique of the orientalism implicit in the development of historical linguistics analyzes linguistic structure but pays special attention to how the practices by which colonial linguists talked and wrote about colonial languages promoted imperial projects of racialization and domination. Other scholars have combined fine-grained analyses of changing linguistic structures with attention to the political dimensions of metalinguistic ideologies. Some of the most notable examine Christian evangelization in colonial contexts, with particular attention to how domination is made manifest through changes in linguistic structure (e.g., Rafael 1988, Burkhart 1989, Mannheim 1991, Durston 2008).

Another example in this latter category is Hanks' (2010) analysis of how colonial friars imposed Christian concepts of order through *reducción*, a process by which dispersed indigenous populations were relocated in nucleated settlements. In the Yucatán, this produced what Hanks calls *Maya reducido*, a new form of the language that came to pervade and remake all spheres of the Maya discursive universe and whose traces exist today in the speech of contemporary Yucatec Maya speakers. Hanks' masterful study shows how language change at multiple levels aligns with the historically specific reconfiguration of power relations emerging in colonial Yucatán. It is among the best models for work integrating the study of linguistic structures, practices, and ideologies alongside deep engagement with particular historical contexts and historical events. An even more complex vision of this particular language–society–history nexus emerges by reading Hanks' account alongside more traditional ethnohistorical work on the Yucatán (e.g., Chuchiak 2010, Farriss 1987, Restall 1997b), which collectively offer an account of how the Maya received and transmitted the colonially inflected language among themselves. Of course, such a capacious perspective is not possible in all places and periods: the body of historical sources related to Yucatán's colonial past is larger and richer than is available in many other cases. Nevertheless, the complex picture offered by this assemblage of approaches suggests that future research would benefit from trying to approximate a similar synthesis, one joining attention to the social dynamics of specific historical contexts with an examination of how interpretations of histories affect those histories themselves as well as our understandings of them in the present.

9.5 Looking ahead: Towards new research on language, society, and history

Linguistic anthropologists have a range of tools available for producing holistic, nuanced understandings of the field shared by language, society, and history. Taking research to a new level, however, will require

synthesizing and integrating the two broad trends marking scholarship to date: research emphasizing the pursuit of history as a kind of fact-finding mission, where engagement with linguistic and cultural context provides access to information otherwise unavailable; and research emphasizing history as a primarily interpretive endeavor, entailing attention to the meanings people have made of history – history as representation – rather than to particular pasts per se. These quite different theoretical frameworks have tended to be coupled to divergent temporal foci: scholarship in the first vein has tended to focus on past historical contexts while that in the second has tended to stress present ethnographic settings. These differences have in turn mapped onto, and been deepened by, disciplinary orientations – towards history and linguistics in the first case, towards anthropology and cultural studies in the second. Such institutionalized divisions and how they facilitate the entrenchment and localization of scholarly discourses make it harder to promote synthetic approaches drawing on both lines of inquiry. It is notable that of the works reviewed here few do so successfully.

Producing scholarship that is effective on this score will not be easy, and it would be foolish to suggest there are easy solutions. Nevertheless, we think the field's development to date suggests areas where scholars might fruitfully direct their energies in order to integrate historical and meta-historical approaches. Doing so offers the hope of more fully synthesizing the study of history with the study of social life, and of joining linguistic anthropology's ongoing interest in language use as social process with attention to how history is both made and made meaningful through such social processes.

The late Rolph Trouillot (1995) argued that in order to achieve new understandings of past events we must attend to how our narratives of history are based on both conscious and unconscious decisions about what is of historical interest, for otherwise we are at the mercy of dominant ideologies about history and received facts about the past. This admonishment demands that we be reflexive about our processes for selecting and discarding data – about, as it were, the archives we consciously and unconsciously create. Language is, of course, a peculiar kind of archive, and the selective terms on which we engage with it analytically remake the archive in ways we may fail to recognize. Bakhtin would, of course, agree with Emerson that “language is the archives of history”: each linguistic sign, each utterance, is a footnoted, multivocal, polysemous entity, a palimpsest made of numerous past contexts and numerous interpretations of their meaning. The promise language holds out, however, for deeper understanding of history in social context will remain unrealized unless we also take to heart how language not only archives history but makes it as well, producing historical realities as well as the narratives by which those histories are made meaningful – and not least, those narratives that we, as scholars, use language to construct.

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A language is a method of communicating with others. There are 7,000 languages worldwide, but the most important are English, Mandarin and Spanish. Some societies also have minorities who do not speak the official language. Especially in countries in which immigration has played an important part in history, you can find several spoken languages. In the United States Spanish is the most common language next to English, but there are hundreds of thousands who speak Polish, Russian or Italian because their families have gone to the US during some point in history. All over the world, millions of translators translate one language into another. Such people are especially needed in international organizations, like the United Nations or the E Wales History. Themes. Society and culture. Celtic languages. Welsh language: The Welsh language in 19th century education. Latest. History of Wales. Yet according to historian John Davies, it is unlikely that the use of the Welsh Not was as widespread as the mythology of the 20th century maintains. There is strong evidence of the Welsh Not in Carmarthen, Cardigan and Meirionnydd before 1870, but it was never official government policy. A number of school organisations used it, from the national schools of the Anglicans to the British schools of the nonconformists, but attendance at these schools was voluntary and if a headmaster had a Welsh Not policy it was with the approval of the parents. Language, History, and Identity: Ethnolinguistic Studies of the Arizona Tewa. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. Kulick, Don. 2006. Interpreting Language Variation and Change. In Language, Culture and Society: Key Topics in Linguistic Anthropology, ed. Christine Jourdan and Kevin Tuite, 229-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.