LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Cooperating with Written Texts: The Pragmatics and Comprehension of Written Texts.
Dieter Stein, ed. Studies in Anthropological Linguistics, 5. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992. 712 pp.

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This is an extremely miscellaneous collection of 32 papers about written texts, largely from linguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives, originating in a West German conference in 1989 with the same title as the volume. Accordingly, it appears that most of the contributors are linguists, with the majority from Germany, although this is difficult to determine because no biographies, academic affiliations, addresses, or specialties are provided for the authors. The placement of this volume in the Studies in Anthropological Linguistics series seems fortuitous, as only a very few contributions recognize the placement of texts within cultural contexts or the influence of those texts on the ambient culture. Most of the studies are directed entirely to the text as bounded by the representations on the page or in relation to a culturally undefined psychology of the reader. Despite the title of the volume and conference, "Cooperating with Written Texts," few of the contributions give more than passing mention to the problems of texts creating cooperation among people or of an individual adjusting perception to align him- or herself more cooperatively with the text. The subtitle, "The Pragmatics and Comprehension of Written Texts," does more adequately reflect the themes of a larger part of the articles.

The collection is organized in six parts. The first part is entirely psycholinguistic in a generally universalistic mode: "Writing, Literacy, and Comprehension." The second part, "Developmental Aspects: The Evolution of Written Texts," offers two chapters potentially of anthropological interest: one a study of how language comprehension changes with the emergence and learning of a written form of a traditionally oral language among the Mohawk; another that reminds us of the various cultural factors within which the pragmatics of medieval European texts need to be assessed. Unfortunately, the latter never gets beyond general considerations to the specific assessment of particular kinds of texts. Another chapter of the analysis of scientific texts is really on a study in text-focused deixis, paying little attention to the substantial work done in science studies and rhetoric on the cultural dynamics of scientific texts.

Part 3, "Literary Texts: Inferring Meaning(s)," is text-bound in its analyses. Part 5, "At the Interface of Linguistics and Pragmatics: Individual Linguistic Structures," and part 6, "Computational Modeling of Text Comprehension," are focused entirely on linguistic structure.

Part 4, "Pragmatics and Individual Text Types," does offer a few more articles that consider how texts serve varying functions in culture, can be used variously according to cultural imperatives, and are shaped in form and content by cultural ends. This section includes chapters on the moral hortatory function of Puritan wills, the duplicitous relation of legal notices to various ostensible audiences and supervisory regulators, the way values enter into the interpretation of texts, and how text understanding seems to occur at the intersection of personal, social, and cultural factors.

Perhaps the miscellany of the volume indicates how much at a loss traditional linguistics is when it attempts to return to the study of written texts, which it abandoned earlier in the century in favor of oral language. In any event, although some of the articles are interesting in isolation, there seems little focused relation among them to suggest that any leading-edge synergy went on at the conference or would emerge from a reading of this volume or its parts.

Language in Its Cultural Embedding: Explorations in the Relativity of Signs and Sign Systems. *Harald Haarmann.* Studies in Anthropological Linguistics, 4. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990. 292 pp.

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On one page we espy a sacrificial tablet from the tomb of Iunu, a high-ranking official under pharaoh Cheops. On another we are surprised by a diagram of modern dental laboratory equipment, complete with numbered arrows keyed to descriptors such as "melt push-button" and "coil lifting lever handle." What do these have in common? Both are examples of pictures (iconically coded

information) interacting with language (semantico-referential information). And both are discussed in this wide-ranging book, along with rock carvings from the eastern shore of Lake Onega in (formerly) Soviet Karelia, *carmina figurata* from the 18th century to the present, Latin lexical items for body parts in Albanian, Japanese honorifics, the Aztec vigesimal number system, Assyrian cuneiform writing, and more.

Haarmann problematizes linguistic forms and pictorial representations from the perspective of culture, taking the latter as explanatory of the former. Intriguingly, the conceptual explication itself heavily relies upon pictorial representations, principally diagrams consisting in labeled circles or rectangles connected by arrows or lines. There are many of these and they are so similar as to require careful inspection. Why take up so much space, along with so much reader time, with these? Haarmann seems to suggest here an isomorphism between the book as a form of representation and what the book is about. Just as he explains how diagrams and language interrelate, so he uses the interrelations between diagrams and language to effect his explanation.

Threaded throughout the book is a core argument: linguistic and nonlinguistic signs grow out of and are isomorphic with cultural patterns. How are we to understand deictic systems (pronouns such as "I" and "you," or demonstratives like "this" and "that") in diverse languages? We are to understand them as isomorphic with culturally specific images of reality, whether spatial or social. How are we to interpret the Cretan hieroglyphic symbols on a disk from Phaistos? We are to interpret them as icons of Minoan cultural patterns, especially the cult of the dead.

Haarmann devotes a chapter to glottochronology, bringing into his crosshairs its notion of a basic vocabulary. Where glottochronology asserts that some lexical items are more stable, less cultural, and hence more basic than others, Haarmann points to the absence of evidence for stability, noting, on the contrary, case after case of borrowing in just these areas.

Haarmann's book reveals on almost every page a fascination with iconicity. He wants to recapture a place for similarity in the aftermath of a structuralist revolution, turned poststructuralist, that recognizes only difference. His is a welcome complement to developments taking place in the United States as well, where, however, semiotic perspectives often challenge unbridled relativity.

The book makes no reference to the American semiotician Charles S. Peirce or to the trichotomy of signs (icon, index, symbol) with which he is associated. While Haarmann is undoubtedly familiar with the work—which is so important in the United States today—could his own ideas benefit from greater attention to the index, along with the icon and symbol? My suspicion is that they could, that further reflection on indexicality would call into question the primacy of iconic linkage between sign vehicles and culturally patterned images of reality. Furthermore, it would lead to the problematizing of culture, which could then no longer be the explanatory backdrop for semiotic relativity, becoming instead itself an object of interrogation from the perspective of semiotics.

SOCIAL/CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology through Irish Case Studies. *Marilyn Silverman* and *P. H. Gulliver*, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. 436 pp.

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This collection of essays speaks to some pressing concerns in the anthropology of Ireland, and it should be of interest to ethnographers of other areas as well. The various contributors successfully develop the volume's main themes concerning the uses of history for ethnography, the methodological considerations that apply to this synthesis, and the singular opportunities that Ireland presents for the historically inclined ethnographer and the ethnographically sympathetic historian. Further in its favor, many of the contributors examine locales in the relatively less investigated southern and eastern regions of Ireland (county Kilkenny is particularly well represented). These areas present interesting contrasts with the West, specifically Connacht ("Connaught" in the authors' renditions) and the poorer parts of Munster, which have larger anthropological bibliographies. Finally, the book should be of some use to students because its list of references