

## Linguistic Anthropology at the University of Arizona: A Personal Account

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### 1. The Job Interview

I was hired by the Anthropology Department at the University of Arizona the old fashioned way. At the annual American Anthropological Meetings in 1973 I had just given a paper titled, "Teasing, Punning and Putting People On". It was about the humorous playing with reality engaged in by North American Indians in the Plateau and Plains areas where I had done research. I was in a nearby ladies restroom when I was approached a woman I didn't know. She introduced herself as Ellen Basso and she told me that she and her then-husband Keith Basso had just heard my paper, really liked it, and wanted me to apply for a position for a linguistic anthropologist at the University of Arizona. I knew Keith and his work on Apache language use. I had met him at an ethnography of communication conference a few years before that had led to an influential edited collection on the topic by Dick Bauman and Joel Sherzer. I remembered Keith

playing the guitar and singing rock and roll songs at the party after the conference at the Baumans' home. The job I was being encouraged to apply for was not advertised anywhere. That is why I say I got it the old fashioned way-- --through an old boy network, but now obviously it was an old girl network too.

There were actually two positions for linguistic anthropologists open in the department to bring the total of linguistic anthropologists up to four. Richard Diebold was hired for the second position. Recruitment was simultaneously going on to start a linguistics department oriented toward formal theoretical linguistics at Arizona where there had only been an interdisciplinary graduate program in linguistics up to that time. The Dean of Social Sciences was a physical anthropologist from the Anthropology Department, Hermann Bleibtreau. This dean was making sure that the anthropological study of language would remain strong at the University of Arizona, even as linguistics came

to have a real home of its own. He was also making sure that anthropology continued to play a role in the wider university's expanding contributions to the study of language. The University of Arizona offers one of the widest and best arrays of approaches to the study of language in the western United States. Over the years I was in the Anthropology Department the linguistic anthropology program supported, contributed to and benefitted from the development of not only the Linguistics Department, but also the Department of Language Reading and Culture in the College of Education, and the Ph.D. Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching in the College of the Humanities. Cognitive Sciences and Communications were other highly relevant programs that emerged during the years I was in the department. Our graduate level courses attracted students from all over the university.

When I eventually came to the University for a job interview, there were several aspects of the Anthropology Department's situation that I found particularly appealing and that laid the foundation for my great appreciation of the department. First I really liked the town. I remember looking down on the Sam Hughes

neighborhood from high up in the hotel at Speedway and Campbell where job candidates were put up for years and thinking what a livable town Tucson appeared to be, with pleasant neighborhoods in every direction (in spite of the fabled ugliness of Speedway Boulevard itself). I have never stopped feeling that the quality of life is good here.

Second, I really liked the archaeologists. I remember sitting on the floor at the party the department held for me at Ray Thompson's house, talking to Pat Culbert about Mayan archaeology and thinking, "God, this is so interesting!" My dear life-long friend Carol Kramer, who I had known since graduate school, became the first female archaeologist in the department. She was the great party hostess of the department in her time and she always invited me to her parties, which kept me connected to the archaeologists as long as she was alive.

Before the all-important talk that was part of my job interview, Keith Basso advised me that if a man with a very red chin came up to me, I should know it was Ned Spicer, the famous cultural anthropologist who had done extensive research with North American Indians, including the nearby Yaqui Indians. At that time Ned

was playing a role in helping the Yaqui obtain the highly prized status of a federal Indian reservation. The talk I gave was titled, "Some Sources of Cultural Variability in the Regulation of Talk", later published as a paper in the journal *Language and Society*. At the end of my talk, which was based on my dissertation research on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, I made it very clear that my characterization of the aspects of interactional organization that vary cross-culturally was based on one field experience, and I was not trying to make general areal claims about North American Indian communicative behavior. After my talk ended, but I was still up in front of the room, sure enough, up came a beaming bearish man with white hair and a startlingly red chin (from radiation therapy for jaw cancer), and without introducing himself (I was glad Keith had warned me) he said, "You'd better start generalizing". This was the beginning of a long-term friendship with Roz and Ned Spicer, who invited me to live in a little house behind their home and who made me, my boyfriend and eventual husband, Wes Addison, and son Charlie, a part of their extended family.

Ned personified what was at that time talked about in the de-

partment as "the Arizona personality." To this day I am not sure what all was meant by the term, which was applied primarily to the faculty members, but I thought it referred to people who were unassuming, easy-going and able to get along with one another.

These impressions, as well as the general reputation of the Anthropology Department, made me eager to join the department.

## 2. Years in the Department

I was a professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Arizona for thirty-one years, from 1974 to 2005. As it turned out, I generally enjoyed and respected my colleagues from the very beginning of my years at the University of Arizona. Two of my past professors were already in the department when I arrived in the fall of 1974. Jane Underwood had been my undergraduate thesis advisor at the University of California, Riverside. She was a rigorous teacher who demanded we all do empirical research as undergraduates in her physical anthropology course. Bob Netting had been my cultural ecology instructor when I was in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. He had already turned me into an economic determinist,

then, before I even got to Arizona.

One of the qualities of the Arizona Anthropology Department that I particularly valued enduringly was the collegiality among the very smart people in this department. One often heard of factionalism in other anthropology departments---sometimes to the point where whole departments split in half---and I personally experienced such factionalism during visiting professor stints in other universities. It can mean people avoiding each other in the halls, glaring at one another when they do encounter one another, and talking obsessively about the individuals they hate. That does not even touch the damage factionalism can do to department programs. In our department, even when there were conflicts between individuals or groups over particular issues, I did not think they endured.

Maybe it was "the Arizona personality" that made the department this way. Maybe it helped that faculty gossiped very little about one another (although students certainly gossiped about faculty). Possibly also, one way that actual intellectual conflicts were dealt with was through the erecting of what one could call "procedural walls" between the four sub-disciplines in this staunchly

"four field" department. Such walls were already in place when I arrived in the department. Archaeology, Cultural Anthropology, Physical Anthropology and Linguistic Anthropology each had a good deal of control over especially sub-disciplinary graduate program curriculum. Such control only increased during the thirty years I was in the department. Still, votes on hires and tenure decisions of individual faculty were up to the entire faculty at the time I retired.

The sub-disciplinary autonomy was particularly noticeable in the cases of cultural and linguistic anthropology. In some departments linguistic anthropology is considered part of cultural anthropology, or there is a general blurring of the lines between these sub-disciplines, but this is much less true at the University of Arizona. Administratively sharp sub-disciplinary boundaries can have both positive and negative dimensions for requirements for students, for collaborative research, and for the kinds of disciplinary identities and abilities students take with them into the world. Clearly there is far less grounding in all four of the sub-disciplines for graduate students in the department now than there was decades ago. Faculty in today's School of Anthro-

pology are also less likely to have a background in all four subfields than they were at the time I came into the department.

There were other appealing qualities of the department besides collegiality. As a junior faculty member I was grateful for the way I was treated by my colleagues. I was made aware that I had come into the department with the full backing of the faculty. I did not feel I had to hold back my opinions at the then smoke-filled faculty meetings lest I anger others and threaten my possibilities for tenure. When I was awarded two post-doctoral fellowships, the Head of the department, Ray Thompson, let me take both of them in sequence so that I could take my research interests in the new direction of the study of language and law. Ray even gave me a small percentage of my salary one year for the work I continued to do for the department and to compensate for the small stipends that went with the fellowships. I was also protected from heavy service loads. This is a protection that was eroded over time so that more demands were made on junior faculty who came after me. This erosion of protection happened in part because of the general increase in service loads for faculty in universities

as "accountability" practices became elaborated. All of us spent more and more time evaluating programs and individuals, with questionable results.

I was supported in other ways as well. Even though I became pregnant during the first of my post-doctoral fellowships, and came up for tenure while our son was still a baby, it literally never occurred to me that this might threaten my tenure prospects in the way many other female junior faculty at the University of Arizona believed it would or did. Part of my confidence stemmed from the fact that there were already several women in the department when I arrived: Clara Lee Tanner, Jane Underwood, Connie Cronin and Ellen Basso. It was also readily apparent that many of the men in the department were married to women who were feminists, which I found reassuring.

This was at a time when many anthropology departments had NO women in tenure track positions who one could work with, including the Anthropology Department at the University of Pennsylvania where I got my Ph.D.

Finally, in our department, it was always taken for granted that faculty members would go to conferences, give papers, publish the papers, take leaves to carry out

research, and be aided in all this by a friendly, organized, upbeat and intelligent support staff. This was, then, a department that encouraged scholarly productivity. One might think that all of this would be true in any academic department, but again, emphatically, this is not the case. And this isn't just a matter of whether money is available for scholarly endeavors. Not all anthropology departments have a subculture in which one's colleagues and staff offer support, appreciation, and good will for efforts made to contribute to a scholarly discipline.

### **3. The Linguistic Anthropology Program**

During the time I was in the department a number of faculty members besides myself held positions in the sub-discipline of linguistic anthropology: Keith Basso, Paul Turner, Richard Diebold, Jane Hill, Willem de Reuse, Rudi Gaudio, Norma Mendoza-Denton and Jen Roth-Gordon. Today Jen Roth-Gordon and Qing Zhang comprise the linguistic anthropology faculty.

The graduate program in linguistic anthropology at the University of Arizona began to flourish in the 1980s, as did other areas within the department. The

sub-disciplinary autonomy I have already described gave Jane Hill and myself---the two long-term or enduring linguistic anthropology faculty---a good deal of control over the structure of the program.

By this time there had been a major intellectual shift in linguistic anthropology away from a focus on the description of the structure of non-European languages through grammars, texts and dictionaries based on informant elicitation. Attention had turned to the study of living language use through audio recordings contextualized by Malinowskian participant observation. This basic approach has been a constant central focus of the linguistic anthropology program at the University of Arizona as long as I have known the program.

Language structure is still central to the anthropological study of language, but the questions asked of language have changed. We ask how the range of linguistic alternatives available within a speech community (its linguistic resources) are drawn upon selectively to accomplish different social actions and construct different social realities. We also ask how these specific functional differentiations are similar and different cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. This orienta-

tion has transformed research in many areas, including the study of multilingualism and the study of speech registers.

With the centrality of the ethnographic study of language use, discourse analysis also became central to linguistic anthropology. Some anthropological discourse analysts built on the earlier Americanist tradition of the collection of largely monologic texts, focusing on sources of coherence and internal sequential structure in clearly bounded speech genres. Others were more interested in how the relation of text to context shaped the form and meaning of a speech genre.

A third tradition of analysis that came to the fore as part of the shift to a focus on language use was the study of face to face interaction. Sociological approaches to interaction were brought into anthropology through Dell Hymes' and John Gumperz' ethnography of communication. They incorporated the work of Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel, and the conversation analysts Harvey Sacks and Emmanuel Schegloff into their concepts of speech events and discourse analysis. This happened during the vibrant period in the late 1960s when there was great intellectual interchange among the disciplines of linguistics, an-

thropology, sociology, and even folklore and philosophy that came to be called "sociolinguistics". I myself had already been heavily influenced by the work of Garfinkel and Goffman through research with UCLA anthropologist Bob Edgerton and as an undergraduate in sociology courses at the University of California, Riverside, particularly through sociologist Aaron Cicourel. When I saw the influence of this work in Dell Hymes' writings, I immediately gravitated to him as a mentor.

The interactionist conceptualization of how sociocultural realities are constituted through language use is the approach to language use with which I personally still most strongly identify and have always been grounded in. In this view meaning is jointly created through the process of interaction, turn by speaking turn, and thus linearly through time. Meaning is not just owned by the individual speaker. Meaning is also not just cultural, homogenous, or widely shared. Rather, meaning is emergent in interaction as each speaker literally alters the meaning of the previous speaker through his or her response. Methodologically this means that one must study speech in actual social occurring interaction in order to understand and

characterize how meaning is created, and to thus understand the basic nature of language in human life. Culture is located, carried by and constituted through language use in face-to-face interaction, and this is the basic reason why the study of language is a part of cultural anthropology as well as the focus of linguistic anthropology. Culture is located both in repetition or routinization of speech and in what is experienced as new and creative in speech.

These theoretical orientations taken in the study of language use were basic to the linguistic an-

thropology program while I was in the Anthropology Department and they continue to be central to the study of language in American anthropology.

#### **4. Conclusion**

I congratulate the School of Anthropology on its hundredth anniversary. This department has played an important role in fostering the anthropological study of language and I feel privileged to have been a part of that fostering and a part of such a terrific department and scholarly endeavor.