

Letter from Retirement

by Professor Emeritus John Gumperz

Half way into the twelfth year of retirement I find myself reflecting on what I've seen, done and learned since retiring from the department, and I thought it might be interesting to share some of these reflections with others.

In 1991 I was engaged in what I thought was some of my most interesting research, and also actively working with about ten graduate students. I had hoped to stay for a few more years but as one of the academic cohort that had to retire at 70, I had no choice but to take the 1991 VERIP, the year before I was officially due to retire.

The notice arrived while I was in Berlin on a six-month visiting research fellowship at the newly established Max Plank Working Group led by Stephen Levinson, a Berkeley Ph.D. The initial working group included Penny Brown, John Haviland and Lourdes de Leon, his wife, as well as my wife, Jenny Cook-Gumperz. A year or so later the Levinson group moved to Nijmegen in the Netherlands and is now known as Cognitive (read linguistic) Anthropology Research Group at the Max Plank Institute for Psycholinguistics, where among others things, it has been engaged in large scale comparative research on spatial deixis that would have been difficult to fund with U.S. support. The success of this project played a major role in the 90s in persuading the Max Plank Society to establish two other centers for anthropological research: The Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig led by Michael Tomasello, author of *The Cultural Origins of Cognition*, known for its persuasive arguments against the biosocial reductionism of much current psychological and linguistic research, and Bernard Comrie, a linguistic typologist of world renown. More recently an Institute for Social Anthropology (Ethnologie in German) was established in Halle, Germany. I wish we had similar funding sources in the U.S.

I had two reasons for going to Berlin. First, Levinson and I were in the process of planning the Wenner-Gren Foundation sponsored "Rethinking Linguistic Relativity" conference, scheduled for May 1991. John Haviland was also a conference participant, and each of us had some familiarity with the others' ideas. The working group provided an ideal setting for informal discussions on the program and on how to meld what has been learned about the cultural bases of communicative practice into more traditional Whorfian concerns. The conference proceeded on schedule and the volume that builds on it appeared in 1996, the fifth year of my retirement. I believe the volume does a good job of showing that the notion of relativity also applies to discourse.

There was also another more personal reason for the Berlin trip, more in line with my earlier research on guest workers in Britain. As a native of Germany I had followed the public discussions on German unification and wanted an opportunity to gain some first-hand insight into the communicative import of East/West re-unification. Apart from dialectologists' listings of phonetic and lexical differences between the two regions, very little had been done on this issue. The basic question I wanted to pose was: "Could 45 years of nearly absolute isolation and immersion in radically different social worlds overcome several centuries of shared history, to bring about communicatively significant cultural differences in a population? Was it the case that the differences in ideology and attitudes that seemed to pervade public sphere discourse were merely surface phenom-

ena? To put it somewhat differently: Can Whorfian arguments apply to discourse?"

In recent work I have found a number of instances where English-speaking professionals of minority language background, who have given up their native language, yet nonetheless import traces of native language syntax and rhetorical conventions into their English. They use these automatically without conscious reflection and such practices can seriously affect the outcome of an encounter. In the East German case if such differences occurred, and if they can be shown to affect communication with West Germans, the phenomenon might have important consequences for the way we look at the language and culture nexus. That is unlike the intercultural encounters we read about in the literature, as in this situation participants speak the same language and show no overt signs of cultural difference. The issue is most certainly complex, and I could not even begin to deal with it in the short time I had for research. I decided to rely on a strategy of observation and informal discussion combined with recordings of key verbal encounters ranging from informal family and friendship talk, to public discussion sessions. My hope was this would provide the background information needed for formulating more focused research plans. But the strategy also raised some ethnographic problems.

Initially research was supported by a sabbatical leave and by a small grant for analysis from the UCB Center for West European Studies. The work in Germany was partly funded by long term German Science Foundation funds to German colleagues. These enabled me to visit Germany a number of times in the 1990s from periods a week or so, to several months, and so become acquainted both with West German and with some East German scholars. Among other things I had visited the DDR Academy, the institution charged with language research and policy in the East German period before the Wende (reunification) during an earlier stay in Berlin. The fact that in 1991 I was able to talk to several of my old acquaintances made it possible for me to find willing colleagues who talked to me about my project and helped in finding the right approach to data elicitation. This was by no means a straightforward task. Given the hostility against "Wessie" (West German) and other Western academics, any reliance on direct questioning would have been doomed to failure. The ethnographic problem was one of collecting the right kinds of discourse data and that I was able to do through some organized group discussion sessions. Other informal conversations my wife and I collected as visitors to the old tourist sites in Brandenburg, north of Berlin. I returned from Berlin with about 30 hours of recorded discussions and conversations as tape recordings ranging from life history interviews to public debates, public speeches as well as interviews and family discussions. Preliminary discourse analyses seem to confirm my initial hypotheses, and I am continuing to work on the project with occasional support from small UCB Senate grants.

I mention this project to suggest that this was not just another research task for me, it also significantly affected the way I now look at discourse analysis. It made possible for me to form informal relationships with German scholars on both sides to gain a better understanding of how closely the research that can be done is tied into the political climate in which it takes place. I hope to develop these ideas in more detail as this work has taken what for me are new directions into the study of linguistic ideologies and the politics of language.

Could I have done this kind of work before retirement? Perhaps, but retirement has given me the opportunity to pursue new directions in my work at my own pace. While I miss the stimulation of working with graduate students, retirement has motivated me to go out into the world and find colleagues with whom I share significant interests. I will expand on these issues in a follow-up letter to appear in a later issue of *BAM!*

February Happenings in Anthropology

All Brown Bags Lectures: noon, rm. 101, ARF, 2547 Channing
All 290 Lectures: 4pm, 160 Kroeber, unless otherwise noted.

- 2/3** Faculty mtg. 2:30-4, 221 Kroeber
ARF Winter lecture, 3-5pm, 2547 Channing
Alison Wylie, Washington University, *The Promise and Perils of an Ethic of Stewardship in Archaeology*, Reception follows.
Museum Reception (4-6pm) honoring Pat Kirch and Doug Sharon, 102 Kroeber
- 2/5** ARF Brown Bag Lecture Series—Bonnie Clark (UCB) *On the Edge of Purgatory: The Archaeology of Abandonment in Hispanic Colorado*
290 Lecture Series—Dr. Andrew Ross (New York University) *The Industrialization of Bohemia: Lessons from New Economy Workplaces*, 5pm, 221 Kroeber (The Gifford Room)
- 2/10** Ex Comm mtg. (10-12)
- 2/12** ARF Brown Bag Lecture Series—Kathy Twiss (UCB) *Goats, Cows, and Cultural Collapse: Faunal Remains and the End of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic*
- 2/17** No school. President's Day holiday
- 2/18** 290 Lecture Series—Dr. Barbara Bender (University College, London) *Going Public: Making an Exhibition*
- 2/19** ARF Brown Bag Lecture Series—Dr. Barbara Bender (University College, London) *Landscapes of Movement and Exile*
- 2/24** Ex Comm mtg. (10-12)
- 2/26** ARF Brown Bag Lecture Series—Tom Guderjan (Maya Research Program) *Blue Creek: The Structure of a Maya City*

KAS Publishes Volume 88!

The Kroeber Anthropological Society is pleased to announce that Volume 88 of the Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers is now available. For information about this volume, annual subscriptions, or submitting a paper, please contact kas@sscl.berkeley.edu.

From Anthro Alumna Katie McKinnon

Katie McKinnon has started her new tenure-track job as an Assistant Professor of Anthropology, in the Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, at Saint Louis University, in August 2002.

In addition to several scholarly papers in the works for publication, she is also finishing up some Berkeley business as guest editor of a special edition of the KAS Papers in honor of Professor Gerald Berreman. While Katie was president of KAS in 2001, KAS organized a very successful conference in honor of Berreman's retirement called: *Behind Many Masks: Gerald Berreman and Berkeley Anthropology, 1959-2001*. The KAS Papers volume will have the same name, and will be published in the early part of this semester.

In terms of anthropological fieldwork, Katie will continue her research on the social behavior of capuchin monkeys in Central America. She has done fieldwork in several countries, mainly in Costa Rica, and is now developing plans to work in Nicaragua. She will also be teaching a field school in primate behavior in Nicaragua during the summer of 2004.

Katie says that she misses everyone at Berkeley, but is adapting to her new environment quite well, enjoying the midwest hospitality of her new university and city, as well as four seasons of weather!

This newsletter is produced by the Department of Anthropology, UC Berkeley. The next issue of BAM! will be published March 1, 2003. Please submit all story suggestions and announcements to Holly Halligan at 643.4445 or hollyh@uclink.berkeley.edu

Recent Publications from Berkeley Anthropologists

Gerald Berreman

2001. "Inequality: Comparative Aspects." In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, (N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes, eds.). Oxford: Pergamon. Pp. 7377-7382.

2002. "Ethics versus 'Realism' in Anthropology: Redux." In: *Ethics and the Profession of Anthropology: A Dialogue for Ethnically Conscious Practice*, (Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. Pp. 51-83.

2002. "Aleut Shamanism in the Twentieth Century? An Assessment of Evidence." In: *An Aleutian Journey: Essays in Honor of William S. Laughlin*, (B. Frohlich, A. B. Harper & R. Gilberg, eds.) Publications of the National Museum, Ethnographical Series, Vol. 20. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark. Pp. 24-48.

Simon Lee

Article appearing in the next issue of *Health Care Analysis* (Kluwer International), called, "In a Secular Spirit: Strategies of Clinical Pastoral Education" based on fieldwork done for part of the medical anthropology curriculum.

Donald Moore

2003. *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Edited by Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian. Durham: Duke University Press.

John Ogbu

Black Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Publishers.

"Closing the Academic Gap: What Else You Need to Know." *Journal of Thought*, December 2002.

Sven Ouzman

2002. "Encountering an Encultured Nature: Some Edifying Examples from Indigenous Southern Africa." In: *Nature and Culture: Ambivalent Dimensions*, (S. Gauer-Lietz, ed.) Cottbus: Drukzone. Pp. 199-217.

Thurka Sangaramoorthy

2002. "Stigma and Social Isolation." (with David Abramson) Report done for Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. See article at: <http://www.westchestergov.com/health/PDF/6WAVE%201%20stigma.pdf>

Nancy Scheper-Hughes

"Death Squads and Democracy in Northeast Brazil: Mobilizing Human Rights Discourses in the Defense of Children" was selected for a \$3,000 award by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation (NY, NY). The essay will appear in the *HFG Review* this spring.

2003. (with John DeVine) "Priestly Celibacy and Child Sexual Abuse" in the British journal, *Sexualities*, 6(1):15-39.

2002. *Commodifying Bodies*. (Co-edited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loic Wacquant) London: Sage Publications. Series in Theory, Culture, and Society. (The book soon will appear in an Italian version published by Ombre Courte Tracce. Verona, Italia.)

Caitlin Zaloom

"Ambiguous Numbers: Trading Technologies and Interpretation in Financial Markets" is coming out soon in the *American Ethnologist* 30(2).

The Ear

Professor Ogbu's forthcoming book, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates), was the subject of an article in *The New York Times* entitled, "Why Are Black Students Lagging?" (November 20, 2002). He argues that his research indicates African-Americans' own cultural attitudes hinder academic achievement and that these attitudes are too often neglected. . . . **Dar Rudnyckij**, **Jerome Whittington**, and **Karen Greene** are key organizers in the annual conference of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies—the "Workshop on Southeast Asian Futures: Cosmopolitanism, Sovereignty, and Subjectivity," to be held on February 7-8. . . . On March 6-7, **Simon Lee** will present on "Charism and Community: Catholic Women Religious and the Corporate Commitment to Healthcare" in Bethesda, MD, when the Independent Sector's Spring Research Forum meets to address the role of faith-based organizations in the social welfare system. . . . Thanks to **Sven Ouzman** for the idea of devoting a monthly column to recent publications by those in the department. As you can see by the response above, this was an excellent idea.

