

NAAHoLS NEWSLETTER

The North American Association for the History of the Language Sciences

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Annual Meeting to
be held online!

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The 2021 NAAHoLS annual meeting will again be held in conjunction with the Linguistic Society of America (and traditionally with the American Dialect Society, the American Name Society, the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas, the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics, and the Society for Computation in Linguistics).

The LSA annual meeting will take place virtually from 7-10 January 2021, and this year’s NAAHoLS program will take place online, mostly via Zoom, during the day on Friday (8 January), and Saturday (9 January).

Further details about our annual meeting are provided in this edition of the newsletter. We are excited about this year’s schedule of presentations, and we hope you will be able to join us online!

The annual NAAHoLS Business Meeting will be held at 2:00 pm on Saturday (9 January). If there are any items you wish to place on the meeting agenda, please let us know in advance.

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NAAHoLS Program (online, 2021)

**Friday, 8 January
Morning (PST)**

Linguistic Backgrounds and Origins (Zoom session)

Chair: Marcin Kilarski (Adam Mickiewicz University)

9:00 *David Boe (Northern Michigan University):* The language of aphorisms; the aphorisms of language

9:30 *Danilo Marcondes (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro):* The early linguistic turn

10:00 *Margaret Thomas (Boston College):* The history of generative grammar: Four views from the outside

10:30 Break

Perspectives on Language Complexity (Zoom session)

11:00 *Frederick J. Newmeyer (University of Washington):* Discovering “equal complexity”: From Frans Boas to generative grammar

11:30 *Kaius Sinnemäki (University of Helsinki):* Historical claims and current evidence on systematic cross-linguistic variation of language complexity

**Friday, 8 January
Afternoon (PST)**

Language Description and Classification (Zoom session)

Chair: Catherine Fountain (Appalachian State University)

2:00 *Sampsa Holopainen (University of Helsinki):* The history of Saami languages in the handbooks of Uralic linguistics

2:30 *Marc Pierce (University of Texas at Austin):* Contextualizing the 1968 symposium on “The German Language in America”

3:00 *Richard VanNess Simmons (University of Hong Kong, Rutgers University):* The right and proper language: Guānhuà, a convenient lingua franca and the evolution of its conceptualization in China

**Saturday, 9 January
Morning (PST)**

Linguists and their Contributions (Zoom session)

Chair: David Boe (Northern Michigan University)

- 9:00 *Marcin Kilarski (Adam Mickiewicz University), Rafał Szeptyński (Institute of Polish Language, Polish Academy of Sciences): The place of Jakób Handel in the history of language study in Poland*
- 9:30 *Joseph L. Subbiondo (California Institute for Human Science): Theory and practice in linguistic pedagogy: Henry Sweet’s *The Practical Study of Languages: A Guide for Teachers and Learners* (1900)*
- 10:00 *Seung Hwan Kim (Boston College), Elwira Dexter-Sobkowiak (University of Warsaw), Marcin Kilarski (Adam Mickiewicz University): “This language exceeds all my former expectations in richness & beauty”: Daniel Sabin Butrick’s work on Cherokee*
- 10:30 Break

**Saturday, 9 January
Late-Morning (PST)**

**Early Linguistic Documentation of California Indigenous Languages
(LSA / NAAHoLS Organized Session – utilizing PSAV)**

Chair: Raul Aranovich (University of California, Davis)

- 11:00 *Catherine Fountain (Appalachian State University): Early Spanish descriptions of California languages*
- 11:30 *Carmen Jany (California State University, San Bernardino): The underutilized sources for Chimariko: Are there any dialectal variations?*
- 12:00 *Timothy Henry-Rodriguez (California State University, Fullerton): J. P. Harrington’s documentation of Chumash as seen through the lens of a Ventureño dictionary formation*

NAAHoLS Business Meeting (utilizing Zoom)

Time: 2:00 - 3:00 PM (PST)

NAAHoLS Abstracts (online, 2021)

David Boe (Northern Michigan University)

The language of aphorisms; the aphorisms of language

An aphorism, according to the *OED*, is “Any principle or precept expressed in a few words; a short pithy sentence containing a truth or general import; a maxim.” The aphoristic form has a long history (“from Confucius to Twitter,” according to the title of a recent work), and contemporary collections of aphorisms often include a section devoted to “language”. In this presentation, I will examine the historical background of the aphoristic textual genre, with specific attention given to anthologized aphorisms dealing with features of language (or specific languages), along with how these have reflected popular perceptions about linguistic inquiry.

Catherine Fountain (Appalachian State University)

Early Spanish descriptions of California languages

The earliest extant descriptions of the indigenous languages of California date from the periods of Spanish and Mexican colonization (1769-1846), and most were produced in the context of Franciscan missionary endeavors in the region. This paper examines the works of two individuals who penned such descriptions: the Spanish priest Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta, and the Luiseño or Payomkawichum scholar Pablo Tac, situating them within the history of California and the history of linguistics. Both the challenges of working with early descriptions and their potential utility for modern descriptive grammars and dictionaries, and projects of revitalization, are addressed.

Timothy Henry-Rodriguez (California State University, Fullerton)

J. P. Harrington’s documentation of Chumash as seen through the lens of a Ventureño dictionary formation

This paper will discuss the characteristics, advantages, and drawbacks of using the Harrington materials for current projects of linguistic description and analysis. Harrington’s methods were useful for collecting much language data in a short period of time. However, Harrington’s methods also led him to collect data in a too often non-systematic way; such drawbacks of Harrington’s methods have affected the usefulness of his material. This paper will speak to these matters using the author’s personal experiences using the Harrington notes for his construction of a Ventureño-English dictionary.

Sampsa Holopainen (University of Helsinki)

The history of Saami languages in the handbooks of Uralic linguistics

In this presentation, I investigate the way the history of the Saami languages is discussed in handbooks and other general sources of Uralic linguistics. Although Saami has played a key role in Uralic linguistics, early research has suffered from a mixing of linguistic and non-linguistic facts (Salminen 1989; Aikio 2012). This has blurred the understanding of linguistic prehistory, with the Saami people and their language often considered somehow exotic and “non-Uralic” (see e.g., Sinor 1988).

Carmen Jany (California State University, San Bernardino)

The underutilized sources for Chimariko: Are there any dialectal variations?

Many languages representing California's extraordinary linguistic diversity in pre-contact times are dormant or reawakening; as a result, most researchers are working with archival materials. This paper examines the documentation of Chimariko, a northern California isolate last spoken in the 1930s, specifically the early attestation of dialectal variation. Following Powell (1891), there were once two dialects: Chimariko and Chimalakwe. While researchers keep wondering about Chimalakwe, the scarcity and quality of data available and the limited fluency and multilingualism of the consultants may leave the possibility of a dialectal variation uncertain. Recorded differences could be attributed to possible interference from other languages.

Marcin Kilarski (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Rafał Szeptyński (Institute of Polish Language, Polish Academy of Sciences)

The place of Jakób Handel in the history of language study in Poland

We examine the life and work of Jakób Handel (1888-c.1942), an underappreciated scholar whose interests ranged from morphology, semantics, and the history of linguistics to classical history and Jewish studies. Apart from printed publications, his contributions include various forms of outreach directed towards the Jewish community in Lviv. Based on the reviews of his books and the available records of his involvement in professional societies, we point to the reasons behind the relative lack of appreciation of his work among contemporary and later scholars, despite its in-depth and original nature.

Seung Hwan Kim (Boston College)

Elwira Dexter-Sobkowiak (University of Warsaw)

Marcin Kilarski (Adam Mickiewicz University)

"This language exceeds all my former expectations in richness & beauty": Daniel Sabin Butrick's work on Cherokee

In this paper, we examine the contribution of Rev. Daniel Sabin Butrick (1789-1851) to the study of Cherokee. Butrick's descriptions of Cherokee are conspicuous in their richness and degree of detail. For example, his comments on orthography and grammar demonstrate a remarkable sensitivity to the phonology and polysynthetic nature of word structure of the language. Butrick's work is thus significant in view of not only the relative absence of contemporary publications on Cherokee and other Southeastern languages, but also an increasingly dismissive attitude towards the language in the course of the 19th century.

Danilo Marcondes (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro)

The early linguistic turn

The expression "linguistic turn" refers to a movement in the beginning of the twentieth century giving language a central role in the philosophical system as opposed to the psychological or mentalist view then dominant. I argue that this linguistic turn was preceded by a similar one in early modern philosophy during a philosophical debate opposing rationalists and empiricists. Likewise, the revival of ancient skepticism at the beginning of the modern age contributed towards this "linguistic turn" in so far as it attacked the "powers of the intellect" in representing reality. Language, particularly semantics, thus became a relevant alternative.

Frederick J. Newmeyer (University of Washington)

Discovering “equal complexity”: From Frans Boas to generative grammar

This paper traces the evolution of the idea that “all languages are equally complex” in twentieth century American linguistics. The pioneers of American descriptive linguistics, Frans Boas, Edward Sapir, and Leonard Bloomfield, did not believe in equal complexity. It was their students, in particular Rulon Wells and Charles Hockett, who speculated that complexity in one area of the grammar would normally be compensated for by simplicity in another area, thereby leading to all languages being equally complex. This idea was implicitly incorporated into early generative grammar and turned up in several generative-based introductory textbooks.

Marc Pierce (University of Texas at Austin)

Contextualizing the 1968 symposium on “The German Language in America”

In 1968, the University of Texas at Austin hosted a symposium on “The German Language in America,” organized by Glenn Gilbert. The symposium took place at a tumultuous time in the history of linguistics in the USA, when Chomskyan linguistics was becoming the dominant theoretical framework and Labovian sociolinguistics was beginning to push traditional approaches to dialectology aside. In some respects, the symposium can be seen as an attempt to restore traditional approaches to dialectology to their earlier position of prominence.

Richard VanNess Simmons (University of Hong Kong, Rutgers University)

The right and proper language: Guānhuà, a convenient lingua franca and the evolution of its conceptualization in China

The earliest Chinese distinguished between “local dialect”, *fāngyán* 方言, and an “elegant speech”, *yǎyán* 雅言, of the elite. There was also a *tōngyǔ* 通語 “lingua franca” for broad communication. In the Míng dynasty (1368-1644), local dialect came to be known as *xiāngtán* 鄉談 “village talk” and the lingua franca got the prestigious label Guānhuà 官話 “language of the officials” (now “Mandarin”). This presentation examines the evolution of the conceptualization of Guānhuà as it is described by Míng and Qīng scholars of language and literature and expressed in the diverse terms for its varieties.

Kaius Sinnemäki (University of Helsinki)

Historical claims and current evidence on systematic cross-linguistic variation of language complexity

In my presentation, I first briefly review the historical ideas for complexity trade-offs. I then analyze typological evidence for about dozen trade-offs based on earlier research and new data. My aim is to better understand where trade-offs occur, what type of variables are involved, and why. According to the results, trade-offs occur between functionally related variables in all major linguistic subdomains and involve various subtypes of complexity in terms of Rescher (1998). I contextualize this evidence to current discussion on efficiency and evaluate its relation to earlier ideas about trade-offs.

Joseph L. Subbiondo (California Institute for Human Science)

Theory and practice in linguistic pedagogy: Henry Sweet's The Practical Study of Languages: A Guide for Teachers and Learners (1900)

By basing his study of language on phonetics and starting from the spoken rather than the literary language, Sweet radically changed the traditional framework of foreign language teaching and moved linguistics away from the dominant text-based comparative philology of his time. Moreover, Sweet integrated the linguistic theories and practices that he had developed throughout his career such that he could argue that his book not only offered varied practical experiences of teaching foreign languages but also his life-long scientific investigation of language.

Margaret Thomas (Boston College)

The history of generative grammar: Four views from the outside

Historical reflection on the backdrop of generative grammar, and the hows and whys of its appearance in 20th-century America, has been a topic of interest since the late 1980s among linguists and linguistic historiographers. This presentation examines the writings of four scholars who do not identify as linguists, but who have analyzed the history of generative grammar from across academic boundaries: intellectual historian David Harlan; social-science historian Janet Martin-Nielsen; American Studies scholar Jamie Cohen-Cole; and anthropologist Chris Knight. "Outsider" perspectives remind us of the interconnectedness of the study of language to politics, economics, technology, and general trends in public life.

Upcoming Conferences

LSA / NAAHoLS Annual Meeting locations/dates:

2022 → Washington, DC (Washington Hilton), 6-9 January

2023 → Denver, Colorado (Hyatt Regency Denver), 5-8 January

2024 → New York City (Sheraton Times Square), 4-7 January

International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences Milan, Italy (23-27 August 2021)

The Fifteenth International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences, **ICHoLS XV**, originally scheduled from August 24 to August 28, 2020 in Milan, due to the ongoing global Covid-19 crisis, **has been postponed to 2021, from August 23 to August 27, at the same locations in Milan.**

NAAHoLS 2020 DUES

Yearly Membership: \$20 (US)

Lifetime Membership: \$250 (US)

Please make your check out to "NAAHoLS" and send it to: David Boe,
Department of English, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI 49855.

Members from outside the United States: Our treasurer regrets that we are no longer able to accept checks written in currencies other than US Dollars. The cost of bank exchange is more than the cost of membership. We ask that those members send a check written on a US bank or pay their dues by some other means that arrives in US Dollars. We regret any inconvenience this may cause.

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