

FOURTH EDITION

The Anthropology *of* Language

AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY



Harriet Joseph Ottenheimer
Judith M. S. Pine

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AN INTRODUCTION TO
LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY
FOURTH EDITION



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***The Anthropology of
Language: An Introduction
to Linguistic Anthropology,
Fourth Edition***

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2017959084

ISBN: 978-1-337-57100-5

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Printed in the United States of America
Print Number: 01 Print Year: 2017



Harriet Ottenheimer would like to dedicate this book to the memory of her father, William Joseph, who introduced her to the joys of dictionaries and maps, encouraged her to explore ideas, and nurtured her love of languages. And to her mother, Belle Joseph, who introduced her to the joys of reading and writing, encouraged her to explore the world, and nurtured her love of anthropology.

Judy Pine would like to dedicate this book to the memory of her mother, Emily M. Shewmaker, and to her father, Carl W. Shewmaker, both professional users of language whose constant support for her every endeavor continues to shape her life.

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PREFACE

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

The Anthropology of Language is a unique package consisting of a text, a workbook/reader, and a set of applied projects, designed to make the intersection of linguistics and anthropology accessible and interesting to undergraduate students. It is an entry-level introduction to the field of linguistic anthropology that should appeal to students from a wide variety of fields and at a wide variety of levels, from first-years to seniors. The package is based on our decades of experience teaching introductory courses in linguistic anthropology, Ottenheimer at Kansas State University and Pine at Western Washington University, Pacific Lutheran University, and Shoreline Community College. The textbook is designed to introduce basic concepts as succinctly as possible. The workbook/reader and the various guided projects challenge students to think critically about basic concepts and guide them to practical ways of applying their new knowledge to everyday situations. Projects and exercises are doable, enjoyable, and sufficiently challenging to keep student interest high. Our idea is to get students to actively apply the concepts to their everyday lives as effectively—and as early—as possible. Weblinks throughout the core text and the workbook/reader provide jumping-off points for students to find additional articles and sites of interest. The entire package provides a comprehensive user-friendly introduction to linguistic anthropology for undergraduates.

Organization of the Package

All of the components of the package (text, workbook/reader, guided projects, and weblinks) are carefully coordinated. The text points to the workbook/reader, and vice versa. Both point to the guided projects, in which students can test their skills by working on specific semester-long projects such as working with conversation partners or creating new languages. Both include numerous weblinks where students can find additional examples to assist in their learning. Sidebars in the core text give additional examples of practical uses of linguistic anthropology. For instructors adopting the package there is an Instructors' Companion Website with access to a test bank of questions, a set of PowerPoint slides

for lectures, and an Instructor’s Manual with guidelines for teaching the materials and grading the workbook exercises.

Organization of the Text

The textbook serves as the primary jumping-off point for the entire package. The textbook provides a brief, readable introduction to linguistic anthropology, stressing the kinds of questions that anthropologists ask about language and the kinds of questions that students find interesting with regard to language. It covers all four fields of anthropology—physical anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology—and includes the applied dimension of anthropology as well. It teaches basic descriptive/structural and transformational/generative approaches to describing and analyzing languages and shows how to apply these approaches to everyday situations. Each chapter points students to additional exercises in the workbook/reader; each chapter also includes useful weblinks for students to explore. Additional readings are suggested in the Instructor’s Manual. Core chapters are bookended by brief introductory and concluding chapters designed to pique student interest at the start and to reward their completion at the end. The final chapter reminds students that they can apply the insights and tools of linguistic anthropology on a daily basis.

Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics

The chapters and sections on phonology, morphology/syntax, and semantics in both spoken and signed language have been written so that they may be taken in any order. We know that some instructors prefer to begin with syntax and work “down,” whereas others (including both of us) prefer to begin with phonology and work “up.” Some instructors like to preface all the technical material with semantics; others prefer to conclude with semantics. When Ottenheimer first learned linguistic anthropology, the instructor started in the middle with morphology, then progressed to semantics, then phonology, and finally finished with syntax. When Pine learned it, the instructor started with language and culture, then moved to phonology and “worked up” to syntax. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages, and each is probably more “intuitive” for some students and less so for others. As both of us teach the course, we begin with semantics and then progress to phonology, morphology, and syntax, primarily because the language creating project works best this way but also because semantics seems to be the most accessible and interesting to students, particularly when it is introduced in the context of language and culture. Although sign languages are now discussed in every chapter, there is a separate chapter focusing on Sign as well, where we discuss

the phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse elements of Sign all together so that instructors can focus on these important issues. Instructors should feel free to take the chapters in any order. Each has been written as an independent unit.

Gender, Ethnicity, Ideology, and Power

As with sign languages, special care has been taken to include issues of gender, ethnicity, language ideology, and power throughout the text. In addition, several chapters address these issues directly, making them the focus of the discussion. We find that infusing gender, ethnicity, ideology, and power into the materials throughout the semester helps students to appreciate the importance of staying aware of these issues. Still, it is also important to focus on each area separately in order to explore it fully, so we have done both. This is true as well for issues of identity, colonialism, language prejudice, language death, indexicality, framing, signed language, and so on. Each of these issues is addressed in its place in the book, but each is infused throughout the book as well. This enables instructors to keep all these issues continually relevant to the study of linguistic anthropology rather than compartmentalizing them into discrete sections and then abandoning them for the rest of the semester.

Sign Language

In this edition, as in the previous one, we discuss sign language throughout the work as well as foregrounding it in a chapter of its own. The chapters on phonology and morphology/syntax come first, presenting examples from both spoken and signed languages, thus encouraging instructors to emphasize the structural and analytic similarities and differences between these modalities. The chapter on signed languages follows immediately, adding greater depth to students' understanding of signed communication, its history, and issues concerning Deaf communities. The chapter also includes a short section on nonverbal communication in order to clarify the important differences between sign languages and gesture systems. Because special care has been taken to include discussions of sign language throughout the book, we can keep reminding students that sign language is indeed language and deserves to be studied as such.

Language Play, Language Origins, and Language Acquisition/Learning

Grouping these three subjects together helps students to appreciate the complex connections between them. Pine in particular emphasizes the link between playfulness and language learning when teaching her introductory courses, reminding students that humans can and do find learning language an enjoyable experience and encouraging them to

see having fun with projects as a productive approach. Many reviewers feel that this grouping of topics is a significant strength of the book. It helps students to think more constructively about the various sides of the debate over whether language is innately programmed or learned in speech communities. The key question of exactly how and when language began still cannot be answered with any certainty, but Chapter 8 brings much of the latest research to bear in helping students to think about the possibilities. This is one of the areas in which information from all four subfields of anthropology is tightly interwoven, and it is one of the chapters that most engages students with a primary focus on archaeology or physical anthropology.

Variation, Change, and Choice

Most texts treat each of these subjects separately, with the result that students get a disconnected sense of the important questions hidden in these three areas. In fact, the three are very complexly intertwined, and at an introductory level it seems more important to help students see the interconnections than to separate the three into three separate chapters. This is another decision that reviewers of this book have strongly supported. Chapter 9, “Change and Choice,” although longer than most of the others, takes care to continually interweave the various themes of language change and language choice, of standards and dialects, of power and prejudice, and of language ideology and language loyalty so that students come away from the chapter with an enhanced understanding of the power and value of language and the importance of expressing identity through language. The question of language endangerment is also introduced in this chapter, but it gets special focus in the concluding chapter, where specific examples are provided and revitalization efforts are explored. The chapter on Change and Choice should be spread out over two weeks, if possible. Although it can be scheduled as if it were two chapters, this combined approach makes it easier to keep the concepts and their connections alive for the students.

Special Features of the Book

“In the Field” Chapter Openers

Each chapter includes at least one vignette about fieldwork. Most of these are from Ottenheimer’s field experiences, some are from Pine’s. Designed to capture readers’ attention, the vignettes introduce aspects of linguistic anthropology in an unusually engaging way, piquing student curiosity and setting the stage for the material to come. Personal stories help the students relate to linguistic anthropologists as “real” people. Chapters and sections refer back to the material in the vignettes

to show how they can be better understood by using the tools presented in the chapter. The idea is to help students see that real-life experiences can be used to understand and explore linguistic anthropological issues and that it is possible even for novices to tackle such explorations on a beginning level and to learn from their explorations.

“Doing Linguistic Anthropology,” “Cross-Language Miscommunication,” and “Using the Tools” Boxes

These boxes provide additional insights into the subject matter covered in each chapter. They are real stories, taken from real people. Some derive from stories told to us by students. Others are from incidents that have happened to us or to colleagues of ours. Some are written by colleagues. In a few cases, students contributed directly to the boxes. There are three kinds of boxes: those that describe anthropologists using linguistic anthropology in real field situations (“Doing Linguistic Anthropology”), those that describe real cases of misunderstandings due to language difference (“Cross-Language Miscommunication”), and those that describe situations in which someone has applied linguistic anthropology to solving a real problem in the everyday world (“Using the Tools”). Throughout the text, the idea is to show students that the skills and understandings that they gain from linguistic anthropology can be applied to their own lives. The boxes help to establish the fact that students really can learn to recognize and repair “rich points” or “do linguistic anthropology” or “use the tools” that they are acquiring in a variety of everyday settings. These boxes have proven so popular that more of them have been added for this edition. We welcome your, and your students’, stories and are always delighted to hear about them.

Chapter Summaries, Key Terms, and Student Activities

Each chapter ends with a concise summary of the main points introduced in the chapter, followed by a list of key terms introduced in the chapter and a list of suggested student activities. The summaries and key term lists help students to review the subject matter and to study the important concepts. A complete glossary of key terms and definitions is provided at the end of the book. The suggested student activities provide pointers to the readings and exercises in the workbook/reader and give brief descriptions of the guided project modules appropriate to the chapter. Detailed descriptions of the guided projects, how to initiate them and how to monitor them, and how to conclude and assess them, are included in the Instructor’s Manual that is housed in the Instructors’ Companion Website. The Instructor’s Manual also includes lists of suggested readings, designed to help guide students to further research and study should they wish to read more.

Student Activities: Guided Projects

The guided projects are designed to help students apply their knowledge to specific situations. Students find these to be engaging and fun, perhaps even more so than reading the text or doing the workbook exercises! Each project has a set of specific assignments that the students complete as they work through the relevant chapters.

The exercises and guidelines for these projects are provided in the Instructor's Manual that can be found on the Instructors' Companion Website, and the individual exercises can be assigned as the relevant concepts are introduced. Basic directions, and space for completing the various assignments, are now also included in the workbook/reader. Instructors can choose one or more projects, depending on their resources and time limitations. Ottenheimer generally tries to do both projects in a semester, but it takes careful coordination. Pine, teaching in a ten-week quarter system, has found she must choose one or the other; she leans toward language construction, in part because this is becoming a viable career path for linguists. Some instructors allow their students to choose which of the two projects they will do during the semester.

Students comment favorably on how much the projects have helped them to grasp the basic concepts and to understand the applications of linguistic anthropology to everyday life. There are two guided projects: the language creating project and the conversation partnering project.

The Language Creating Project

The language creating project guides students in the process of creating a "real" language in a group setting. Each chapter of the book contains at least one assignment (and sometimes several possible assignments) designed to move the total project forward. Units include forming groups, choosing cultural foci, choosing sounds and creating allophonic variations, forming words and affixes, creating and transforming basic syntactic structures, developing signs and gestures, establishing and marking social differences with language, substituting euphemisms for tabooed words, developing orthographies, and borrowing languages from other groups and observing the changes in their own. It is best to use as many of these as possible during the course of the semester. We use them all. At the end of the term, we have each group present a short skit using their invented language, and we ask them to briefly discuss their language for the rest of the class. A general debriefing rounds out the experience. Students think that this project is "Really cool!" or "Lots of fun," and they often comment on how the experience helps them to understand how languages work. Some groups have even filmed their skits and posted them on social networking sites, and Pine has had students create multimedia presentations, which include film with special effects as well as live acting. One of the key benefits of the experience is the way that it helps students to understand how phonemes and allophones work!

The Conversation Partnering Project The conversation partnering project pairs English-speaking students in the class with international students on their campus. Students whose first language is not English are asked to pair up with a native-English-speaking student in the class. The point is to have students paired up with someone whose first language is different from their own. There is at least one exercise that could be assigned for each chapter (meeting, language and culture, comparative phonology, comparative syntax, sign language ideology, kinesics/proxemics, register and style, writing systems, language play, language families, dialects, and ideologies of language). Each is designed to get students talking with their conversation partners about how their languages (and their ideas about languages) are similar and different. When doing both language-creating and conversation partnering, we recommend selecting only three or four of the conversation partnering exercises to assign in a given semester. If the language and culture exercise is done early, it helps to break the ice between the students and their conversation partners. The comparative phonology exercise, which asks students to create phonetic charts showing their own and their conversation partners' consonant inventories, is especially useful because it helps them to learn a little bit about how phonetic charts really work. This leaves room for one or two other exercises, depending on the time you have available and what you want to stress. Some recent comments from students are: "It was hard at first to start talking, but once we started, it was hard to stop. The entire subject of the C[onversation] P[artner] is really interesting," and "The conversation partner is a great idea! The CP assignments were good because they made you think about and apply knowledge." Many students continue to keep in touch with their conversation partners long after the class has ended.

The Workbook/Reader

The workbook/reader provides classic and contemporary readings and exercises as well as links to relevant and interesting websites where students can explore further. The readings, exercises, and weblinks have all been chosen because of the way they illuminate or expand on the basic concepts introduced in the textbook. The exercises, in particular, are carefully chosen to guide students as they progress from beginning to intermediate in skill level. Each reading or set of exercises is introduced by a brief paragraph explaining its relationship to the textbook.

Readings provide additional background or insight into the subject introduced in the textbook. For example, Chapter 9 of the textbook introduces "mock" languages and discusses Jane Hill's work with Mock Spanish, and the workbook/reader provides Hill's 1995 web article as a reading. Classroom discussions of Hill's article are always lively!

Similarly, the exercises are keyed to specific sections of the textbook. For example, the Chapter 3 workbook exercises for phonetic charts go with the discussion of phonetics in Chapter 3 of the textbook, and the Chapter 9 workbook exercises for reconstructing protolanguages go with the section in Chapter 9 of the textbook on language change and development. A series of workbook exercises drawn from a single language (Swahili) shows students the interconnectedness of different levels of analysis. The workbook/reader also features web-based discussion questions and exercises. Answer keys and guidelines for grading the exercises and discussion questions in the workbook/reader are provided in the Instructor's Manual housed on the Instructors' Companion Website and available to instructors adopting the package.

The Instructors' Companion Website and Instructor's Manual

The Instructors' Companion Website designed for the package provides a test bank of exam questions, a set of PowerPoint slides for lectures, and most important, an Instructor's Manual. The Instructor's Manual provides additional advice and suggestions for using the exercises, readings, and guided projects. Solutions to all of the workbook exercises can be found in this Instructor's Manual, allowing nonlinguistic anthropologists teaching the introductory course to make confident use of these important teaching tools. The Instructor's Manual also includes suggestions for good audiovisual materials to use in class, suggestions for further readings that students might enjoy, and specific guidelines for implementing the applied projects and for integrating them into the syllabus.

The textbook, the workbook/reader, the Instructors' Companion Website, and the Instructor's Manual (access to these last two provided, of course, only to instructors) are designed to provide an engaging, enjoyable introduction to linguistic anthropology and to encourage students to explore further on their own and to try their hand at applying what they have learned to their everyday lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have contributed to the development of this book, both directly and indirectly. Ottenheimer owes a debt, first of all, to all of the creative people under whom she studied language, literature, and linguistic anthropology: Ben Belitt, Kenneth Burke, Stanley Edgar Hyman, and Morton Klass at Bennington College; and Marshall Durbin, Mridula Adenwala Durbin, John Fischer, and Stephen Tyler at Tulane University. They have all influenced her thinking and writing in important and indescribable ways.

She also owes much to her undergraduate students at Kansas State University, many of whom inspired and even contributed to her efforts to expand her lecture notes and worksheets into this textbook and workbook package; Pine was among those students, asking the most difficult and insightful questions at every turn. Ottenheimer could not be more pleased to welcome her as a coauthor for this fourth edition. It is always a pleasure to see one's students become one's colleagues.

Pine, in turn, thanks Harriet Ottenheimer, who first introduced her to linguistic anthropology more than thirty years ago. She considers Ottenheimer to be an invaluable mentor and role model, without whose support Pine does not think she would have the career she currently so very much enjoys. Harriet's invitation for Pine to join her as a coauthor is the sort of recognition she will treasure for the rest of her life. Martin Ottenheimer, Patricia O'Brien, and Michael Finnegan at Kansas State University all helped to shape Pine as the four-fields anthropologist she has become, and she thanks them as well.

At the University of Washington, the late Carol Eastman guided Pine's graduate work in linguistics and linguistic anthropology until her untimely death, while Charles F. Keyes provided her with opportunities to use these skills in a Southeast Asian context and invaluable guidance in ethnographic work in the region. Gail Stygall, also at the University of Washington, introduced Pine to discourse analysis and worked with her as she engaged with literacy studies. She thanks, as well, her mentor Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, at Chiangmai University, without whose guidance she might never have met the Lahu who have shared their lives and language with her.

Both of us wish to also thank our colleagues for their continuing support and encouragement in the development, and now the revision, of this textbook and workbook/reader. It is essential to us to work among colleagues who acknowledge the importance of developing a curriculum in linguistic anthropology and maintaining a strong four-field approach to the teaching of undergraduate anthropology. Ottenheimer's colleagues at Kansas State University included Laura Bathurst, Janet Benson, Jessica Falcone, Michael Finnegan, Tiffany Kershner, Bunny McBride, Pat O'Brien, Martin Ottenheimer, Harald Prins, Lauren Ritterbush, Robert Taylor, and Michael Wesch. Department heads who also supported her work on the first three editions of this textbook and workbook package include Martin Ottenheimer, Len Bloomquist, and Betsy Cauble.

Pine's colleagues at Western Washington University (WWU) have been enormously supportive of the inclusion of a strong linguistic anthropology component in the curriculum and of her work on this textbook. She was fortunate to inherit a strong linguistic anthropology program from Linda Kimball, a program she has been allowed to enhance and

develop with encouragement and support from Daniel Boxberger and Todd Koetje as chairs, and colleagues Sean Bruna, Sarah Campbell, Josh Fisher, Joyce Hammond, James Loucky, Robert Marshall, M. J. Mosher, Kathleen Saunders, Joan Stevenson, Kathleen Young, and Yeon Jung Yu. The warm welcome and ready acceptance she has received from the Interdisciplinary Linguistics Program at WWU, under the able leadership of Shaw Gynan, Edward Vajda, and now Kristin Denham, have provided space to think in a very interdisciplinary way about linguistics, while colleagues working in the Study of Teaching and Learning in Western Washington University's Teaching and Learning Academy, in particular directors Carmen Werder and Shevell Thibou, have given her new insights into pedagogy. These are reflected in her contribution to this book.

Although some of the individuals who contributed ideas and materials wish to remain nameless, many others can be publicly thanked, including Anvita Abbi, Loubnat Affane, Nounou Affane, Soifaoui Affane, Manuel Aguilar, Jocelyn Ahlers, Jun Akiyama, H. Samy Alim, Netta Avineri, Barbara Babcock, Laura Bathurst, Renuka Bhatnagar, Ritu Bhatnagar, Laada Bilaniuk, Bill Bright, Jill Brody, Margaret Buckner, Martin Cohen, Jennifer Dickinson, Anis Djohar, Lelah Dushkin, Karen Dykstra, Begona Echeverria, Kiti Ehtu, Janina Fenigson, James Flanagan, Elizabeth Fortenbery, P. Kerim Friedman, David Givens, Douglas Glick, Dinha Gorgis, Nick Hale, Sallie Han, Ilija Hardage, Sheila Harrison, Sakda (Samui lon) Hasawan, Wendi Haugh, Michael Herzfeld, Jane Hill, Barbara Hoffman, Erika Hoffman-Dilloway, Pamela Innes, Alexandra Jaffe, Shepherd Jenks, Alan Joseph, Belle Joseph, Elizabeth Keating, Ron Kephart, Harriet Klein, Bernard Kripkee, Roger Lass, Linda Light, Lucie Lukešová, Rob MacLaury, Mike Maxwell, Emily McEwan-Fujita, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Leila Monaghan, Cholada (Judy) Montreevat, Sasha Mušinka, Adul, Nanu, Alukaw, Nabon, Jawnee, and Pornipol Nama, Susan Needham, Carsten Otto, Isaku Oweda, Bill Palmer, Jeremy Peak, Laura Polich, Marietta Ryba, Jana Rybková, Jan (Honza) Šabach, , Nannaphat Saenghong, Richard Senghas, Shalini Shankar, Michael Silverstein, Jaroslav Skupnik, Toiouiat Soifoine, Ann Stirland, John Stolle-McAllister, Niwachai (Lipo) Suknaphasawat, Jess Tauber, Bonnie Urciuoli, František Vrhel, Linda Watts, and Brian Wygal. Many of these individuals were gracious enough to put up with our endless questions and to correct our endless mistakes as we tried to learn their languages. We will always be grateful to them for their patience and assistance.

Both of us owe a great debt to our linguistic anthropology colleagues who have inspired us, and with whom (and following the examples of whom) we have worked to develop as linguistic anthropologists. Of course they are way too numerous to name here individually, but we

thank them nonetheless. In addition, we thank Jenna Piotrowski and Bryan Rush for their assistance with this fourth edition.

Anita de Laguna Haviland deserves a special mention for encouraging Ottenheimer to even think of writing a textbook, as does Lin Marshall Gaylord, Senior Development Project Manager at Cengage Learning, for having cajoled her into taking on such a project. It is in large part thanks to Lin's careful critiques and her principled challenges that the book took on the form that it now has, and that an enduring friendship developed. Elizabeth Beiting-Lipps, Product Manager, Seth Schwartz, Content Project Manager, and Chrystie Hopkins, Content Developer, provided continued support and logistics during the preparation of this fourth edition, and we want to thank them in particular for always being there when we needed them. We also want to thank the Cengage permissions team, Rita Jaramillo, Senior Content Project Manager, and Stacey Lutkoski, Manager of Publishing Services at MPS, and the entire production team at Cengage Learning. And special double triple kudos to Peggy Tropp, the most competent and sympathetic copy-editor we have ever had the pleasure of working with on any project. It was a delight working with her again, and we hope this will become an ongoing collaboration.

Our greatest debt of course is to our families. For Ottenheimer this includes her parents, to whom this book is dedicated; her husband and colleague Martin, whose patience seems inexhaustible and who, as a colleague, is always there to challenge her to clarify her writing; her children Afan, Davi, and Loubnat and daughter-in-law Ritu; and her grandchildren Raia and Amira. It is impossible to thank all of them enough. Special thanks go to Raia, who cheerfully provided all sorts of examples while Ottenheimer was first writing the chapter on how children learn language, and to Amira, who provided confirmation, as well as new examples, during the revision of that chapter for a subsequent edition! It is a continuing joy to watch and listen as they discover the complexities of the languages that surround them.

Pine thanks her husband George, whose constant support and assistance in and out of the field have made many things possible, and her children Elizabeth and Carl, who learned early on that they were sources of data and continue to fill this role with a fine combination of resignation and enthusiasm. Her parents, the late Emily M. Shewmaker (née Kemesies) and Carl W. Shewmaker, built the foundation upon which any accomplishments she may achieve rest.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Harriet Joseph Ottenheimer, professor emerita of anthropology at Kansas State University, earned a B.A. in literature at Bennington College and a Ph.D. in anthropology at Tulane University. Her research interests include music, language, and other creative and performative expressions, particularly in African American and African cultures. In addition to extended periods of field research in New Orleans and in the Comoro Islands, she has traveled and lectured widely throughout many other parts of the world. She has special interests in blues, autobiographical narrative, orthography, dictionary construction, fieldwork ethics, performance, and ethnicity. Among her publications are *Cousin Joe: Blues from New Orleans* (with Pleasant “Cousin Joe” Joseph), a blues singer’s autobiography; *The Historical Dictionary of the Comoro Islands* (with Martin Ottenheimer), an encyclopedia; *Music of the Comoro Islands: Domoni* (also with Martin Ottenheimer), in vinyl, cassette, and CD formats; *The Quorum* (with Maurice M. Martinez), a DVD documentary about New Orleans; and the *Comorian–English/English–Comorian (Shinzwani) Dictionary*, a bilingual, bidirectional dictionary. She has taught at the University of New Orleans, Charles University in Prague (on a visiting Fulbright appointment), and Kansas State University. She has lectured in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. At Kansas State University, she was the founding director of the interdisciplinary American Ethnic Studies Program, teaching introductory and advanced courses in that program as well as in cultural and linguistic anthropology. She has received the Kansas State University President’s Award for Distinguished Service to Minority Education and the Charles Irby Award for Distinguished Service to the National Association for Ethnic Studies. She has served as president of the National Association for Ethnic Studies and the Central States Anthropological Association and is currently treasurer of Florida Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America. She is also a U.S. Sailing certified judge and an alto in the Master Chorale of South Florida. She can get by (sometimes just barely) in six languages—English, Spanish, French, Russian, Czech, and Shinzwani. She is currently trying her hand at writing anthropologically and linguistically themed murder mystery novels.

Judith M. S. Pine, associate professor of anthropology at Western Washington University, received a B.A. in anthropology from Kansas State University and a Ph.D. at the University of Washington. She has taught linguistic anthropology for more than fifteen years. Her research interests include literacies, indigeneity, semiotics, and the performance of identity, particularly in Southeast Asia. Her primary research site is a small village in rural northern Thailand, and her work with Lahu has taken her from rural Thailand to densely urban Kunming, China. Her current research focuses on Lahu language music videos, which circulate throughout the Greater Mekong Subregion (an area that includes mainland Southeast Asia and portions of southwest China). At WWU, she teaches introductory and advanced linguistic anthropology courses, qualitative field methods, and Asia-focused courses. She is a member of the Department of Anthropology and is affiliated with the Interdisciplinary Linguistics Program and the East Asian Studies Program.

Pine has served as the Program Committee chair for the Society for Linguistic Anthropology (SLA) and is a cochair of the organizing committee for the first national academic conference hosted by the SLA. She also serves on the abstract review committee of the Conference on Asian Linguistic Anthropology. She speaks English, Spanish, German, Thai, and Lahu and hopes to add Mandarin to that list in the near future.

STUDENT PREFACE

Dear Students: User-friendly is a term that we believe was first used to describe computers, but that is exactly what we intend this book to be—a user-friendly introduction to linguistic anthropology. It is also intended to be brief! It will give you an idea of how language works and how people use it and think about it. It will also give you some basic analytical skills and show you some ways to apply those skills to real-life situations. We will cover all four fields of anthropology: physical anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. So, for example, you will read about the origins and evolution of language, the fossil record and archaeological evidence for language beginnings, dating and tracing language change, and reconstructing ancient languages. You will read about language diversification, issues surrounding dialects and standards, bilingualism and the “English Only” movement in the United States, and endangered languages and language revitalization programs. You will read about sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, non-verbal communication, writing systems, and the role of play in language. You will learn basic descriptive/structural and transformational/generative approaches to describing and analyzing languages, both spoken and signed, and you will learn how to apply these approaches to everyday situations. A special feature of the book is its stress on contemporary issues and the applied dimensions of linguistic anthropology. At the end of each chapter, you will find pointers to additional exercises that can be found in the workbook/reader that accompanies this textbook. Should you wish to read further in any of the subjects we have covered, your instructor will have access to a recommended list of books and articles.

This textbook is designed to be brief and basic—a simple and straightforward jumping-off point. The first and last chapters are particularly brief, just to whet your appetite in the beginning and to reward and challenge you at the end. They are a bit like appetizer and dessert, with the internal chapters serving as the main meal, providing you with deeper explanations of the ideas, skills, and techniques you will need to begin practicing linguistic anthropology in your daily lives. The workbook/reader will provide you with additional depth, expand on specific themes, and give you practice with the technical aspects of linguistic anthropology. The guided projects will take you even further, providing you with practical applications of the ideas you are reading about. Weblinks and sidebars point you in still more relevant directions for exploration and practice. Your instructor will be your guide. Please follow carefully, but be sure to ask lots of questions.

Linguistic Anthropology

In the Field, Comoro Islands, September 1967



"Table," we had said. "We'll need a table. For writing. For eating."

We figured one table could do for both tasks, much as kitchen tables serve both purposes in the United States.

"Okay," our young translator had said, "the landlord says he will provide a table."

But now here we were, exploring our new apartment, and we couldn't find the table. We searched the two rooms thoroughly and explored the outdoor kitchen and bathroom areas as well, but there was no table. Just a large flat metal tray, leaning up against the wall.

"Table," we said when our translator stopped by to see how we were doing. "You said the landlord would provide a table."

The translator looked around the apartment. "Here it is," he said brightly, picking up the metal tray.

"Ah," we said, "but we meant a table with legs, so we can use it as a writing desk."

"Okay," he said, "I'll explain it to the landlord and we'll see if we can find a desk for you."

The next day our monolingual landlord brought us a wooden table with legs. We smiled and tried to remember how to say "Thank you," and felt like our fieldwork was finally beginning. We also knew that to fit into this new culture and do good anthropology we were going to have to learn the language. We were going to need linguistic anthropology.

HJO

What is linguistic anthropology, and why does anyone need it? Linguistic anthropology draws from a remarkable combination of disciplines. Taking its cue from the even broader discipline of anthropology, of which it is a part, linguistic anthropology reaches out in every

direction to make sense of language in every sense of the word. **Linguistic anthropology** goes beyond analyzing the structure and patterning of language (a central focus of linguistics) to examine the contexts and situations in which language is used. It looks at how language might have begun; how it is learned; how it changes; and how it is written down, read, and played with. It looks at how we use words (or silences) to control situations, exert power, or influence others, and how we react to different accents and ways of speaking. It looks at ideas we have about languages and how they should be used. It wonders whether the words we use for things influence the way we experience them, and it wonders whether speaking different languages causes humans to view the world differently from one another. In this book, we will explore these directions and provide a basic understanding of the field of linguistic anthropology, particularly within the context of anthropology.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Because linguistic anthropology is a part of anthropology, it is important to take a moment to describe anthropology more generally and to show where linguistic anthropology fits in. **Anthropology** can be briefly defined as the study of all people, at all times, and in all places. Broadly conceived and comparative in nature, anthropology seeks to understand differences and to discover similarities in human behavior. Anthropology is the study of what it means to be human. It is holistic, it is comparative, and it is fieldwork-based.

Anthropology Is Holistic

Anthropology is **holistic** because it is concerned with seeing the whole picture, with finding all the parts of the human puzzle and putting them together in a way that makes sense. In the United States, in particular, this quest for holism has resulted in what many of us refer to as the **four-field tradition**, in which anthropology is thought of as incorporating four general branches (commonly called subfields):

- Physical (or biological) anthropology—the study of human origins, variation, and evolution
- Archaeology—the study of prehistory and the analysis of ancient cultures
- Cultural anthropology—the study of cultural traditions and the analysis of human behavior and belief systems
- Linguistic anthropology—the study of language and language use in social and cultural contexts

Most anthropologists trained in the United States are expected to have a thorough understanding of the basics of all four branches of anthropology, together with an in-depth specialization in one branch. Anthropology is an unusual discipline by virtue of its very interdisciplinarity. Some of the boundaries between the subfields of anthropology are clearer than others, and some of the subfield boundaries become sites for particularly intriguing research and theoretical speculation. Anthropology has always had an *applied* dimension as well, and in recent years some have argued that applied anthropology should be considered a fifth branch. This is not the place to review the pros and cons of this idea; suffice it to say that all four traditional branches of anthropology have always had—and probably will always continue to have—an applied dimension.

Why do we insist on this breadth of knowledge in anthropology? Why not just focus on the areas that interest us the most? Most anthropology students ask these questions at one time or another. Why know about stone tools, for example, if you are going to be a linguistic or cultural anthropologist? Or why learn the fine points of phonemes (sounds) and morphemes (meanings) if you are going to be an archaeologist or physical anthropologist? The answers reveal a lot about the holistic nature of anthropology and the rich interconnections between its branches. To explore the beginnings of human language you need to understand the biological possibilities, interpret the archaeological record, and assess the complex relationship between the development of language and the development of culture; you need to be able to interpret skeletal remains, tool collections, and settlement patterns just to be able to begin to pinpoint when human language might have been possible. You might even be able to figure out exactly where specific populations might have lived in archaic times just by knowing how to reconstruct the language they might have spoken, particularly if that archaic language includes words for certain plants and animals and not for others.

Ottenheimer certainly had reservations about learning all four branches of anthropology when she was a student. She didn't quite see the point of studying archaeology, for example, when she was interested in linguistic anthropology. But she will never forget the thrill of recognizing a roughly hewn stone tool lying along a riverbank in the Comoro Islands and the subsequent thrill of learning, from an archaeologist with expertise in the area, that it might be an example of a long-sought-for proto-Polynesian hand ax. Had she been more narrowly trained, focusing only on linguistic anthropology, she probably would never have "seen" that stone tool, nor would she have bothered to show it to an archaeologist. Now she feels that she contributed in some small way to the archaeology of the Indian Ocean region, to the study of ancient migrations in the region, and perhaps even to anthropology as a whole.

Pine, meanwhile, was fascinated by both physical *and* linguistic anthropology as an undergraduate, and she finds great satisfaction in exploring and discovering connections between human language and cognition and physical capacities. The complex marvel of language as part of our evolutionary heritage is an area that linguistic anthropology is particularly well prepared to explore.

The four-field holistic approach in anthropology implies that for a full and complete understanding of human beings it is necessary to understand biological origins, prehistory, cultural traditions, and language use. Each of these overlaps with the others in significant ways, and the anthropologist who ignores any one of the subfields runs the risk of missing out on significant insights for his or her own area of focus. In other words, anthropology is holistic because it is the only way to really understand human behavior and beliefs at all times and in all places.

Anthropology Is Comparative

The **comparative** nature of anthropology refers to its goal of gathering and comparing information from many cultures, times, and places, including our own. The more examples we can draw from and compare to other examples, the more complete a picture we can get of how and why humans behave as they do. Collecting and analyzing information about human beings from many different places in the world makes it possible to gain an understanding of the full range of what it means to be human. It even makes it possible to extend our understanding of this range as we encounter examples from additional locations. We learn from this enterprise that the color of our skin or hair or eyes, or the way we make tools or clothing, or the way we choose our marriage partners or cook our meals, or the way we talk to one another is not the only way to be or the only way to do things. We learn that other possibilities exist and that they may work as well (or as badly) for other people as our ways work for us. Anthropologists have a term for this understanding. We call it “cultural relativity.”

Cultural relativity is the idea that differences exist among cultural systems, that different cultural systems can make as much sense as our own, and that we can learn to understand these different systems. “Ethnocentrism,” another term developed by anthropology, is almost the opposite of cultural relativity. It is sometimes defined as judging others by one’s own terms, but it is really more subtle than this. **Ethnocentrism** means *not* understanding different systems on their own terms. There are two aspects to this: the first involves using your own system to interpret what others are doing; the second involves insisting that your own system is the only one that makes any sense. An example of the first is traveling to another country where the monetary system is different and

wondering how much things cost in “real” money (meaning your own money from back home). An example of the second is deciding that there is no functioning economic system in the country to which you have traveled because you don’t recognize what they are using as money at all! It is this second kind of ethnocentrism that anthropologists generally are referring to when they caution you to “avoid ethnocentrism.”

The first kind of ethnocentrism is fairly easy to identify and to overcome. Generally, all it takes is shifting our frames of reference enough to comprehend how the other system works. **Frames of reference** are the ways we see, interpret, and understand the world. Think of the frames on eyeglasses: not only do they hold the lenses, but they also define what will be in focus and what will not, what we will notice and what we will ignore. Contrary to popular opinion, learning other frames of reference does not require us to abandon our own. The fear of losing one’s own frames of reference is what seems to cause the second kind of ethnocentrism and also what makes it more difficult to identify and overcome that ethnocentrism. If you truly believe that the way in which you view the world is the only true way to view it and that all other points of view are dangerous and might cause you to lose your footing in your own world or cause changes in your own world that you are not prepared to accept, then you will have difficulty—in fact you will probably be afraid of—truly understanding another culture or language.

Perhaps the idea that language and culture are intimately connected to one another helps to fuel these fears. And perhaps the idea, held by many monolingual Americans, that it is only possible to really know one language or culture completely fluently adds fuel to the fire. Although these are real fears, all of the data available to us suggests that language and culture, although related in intriguing ways, are not really the same thing and that it is possible to speak two, three, or even more languages competently without losing one’s sense of culture or self. The complex connections between language and culture have been the subject of much research by cultural and linguistic anthropologists, and have attracted the attention of scholars in many other fields as well. Edward Sapir (1884–1939) was one of the early anthropologists to focus his attention on how language affects culture and **worldview**, and his insights have inspired thinkers in many fields to this day. Sapir suggested that our linguistic habits might affect the way we experience and think about the world around us. What does it mean, for example, that Ottenheimer’s Comorian landlord used the single word *mesa* for both ‘tray for eating on’ and ‘table or desk with four legs’, and how might this affect his view of tables, desks, and trays in general? What does it mean that Comorian has just one word *-a* to express both ‘he’ and ‘she’? What does it mean that English has two different words for *he* and *she* but that *he* sometimes can stand for either men or women? Or that in Thai

you must choose from a set of pronouns and proper nouns to refer to yourself and to others, the choice depending on your relative rank and relationship with the person you are addressing or talking about?

We will address these issues more fully in the chapters to come. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that it is possible not only to learn new languages without losing competence in your own but also to understand other cultural systems in their own terms without losing confidence in your own. In fact, learning about other languages and cultures can help you to better understand your own language and culture and to also understand how they work and how they influence you. Anthropology, and especially linguistic anthropology, provides the framework and methodology, the tools and the techniques, for doing this. You will learn many of these skills in this book.

Linguistic anthropology, like all anthropology, is also comparative in another sense. In addition to seeking diversity in our understanding, we attempt to compare and analyze differences in order to discover possible underlying similarities. We may find, for example, that there is a wide variety of kinship systems around the world or that there are some dramatically different ways of talking about time and place, but underneath it all we find that all humans classify kinfolk as opposed to nonkin and that all languages have verbs and nouns. It is just as important for us to understand our similarities as our differences if we are going to make sense of what it means to be human.

Anthropology Is Fieldwork-Based

We said earlier that anthropology provides us with the means to understand other cultural systems on their own terms. It is **fieldwork** that makes this possible. Spending time in another cultural system is not only the best way, it is probably the only way to truly gain an insider's understanding of that system. Although there is some kind of fieldwork in all four branches of anthropology, it is fieldwork in cultural and linguistic anthropology that takes you into another living human culture where you are expected to adapt and adjust your frames of reference until you can understand and operate successfully within that cultural or linguistic system (see Figure 1.1). Once you have successfully adjusted your frames of reference, you are better equipped to translate across cultures, to interpret contrasting concepts, and to explain divergent views. And it is here, perhaps more than in any other part of anthropology, that there is significant potential for the application of anthropology in everyday life.

One good example of how different views of the same information can be expressed in different languages and can have an impact on everyday life is the ways that English and Czech talk about the passage of time. In English, the phrase *half-past ten* expresses the clock time 10:30.



George A. Pine

FIGURE 1.1 Linguistic anthropology is fieldwork-based. Here Pine is learning to transplant paddy rice in Thailand.

In Czech, the same clock time is expressed by a phrase that translates as ‘half of eleven’. We could speculate on the difference of perspective that this seems to imply, but we should also note that if you do not pay close enough attention to the way the time is expressed in spoken form, you could miss your appointment.

Another example of different ways of looking at time comes from the island of Anjouan, in the Comoro Islands. There the day starts at 6:00, not midnight; 6:00 is called first hour, 7:00 is second hour, and so forth. This method of numbering the hours starts over again at 18:00. Yet clocks are routinely set using European times. This means that when you walk into a house where a clock on the wall is displaying 10:00 (or 22:00), it’s really *saa ya ntsanu*, or the fifth hour of the morning (or night).

Not only is fieldwork essential in cultural and linguistic anthropology, but, to gain a true understanding of people and culture, you should conduct the fieldwork in the language spoken by the people among whom you are going to be living and learning. The “table” story from the Comoro Islands (at the beginning of this chapter), the different ways of telling time in Anjouan, and the different frames for time in Thailand (see Cross-Language Miscommunication 1.1: Showing Up Early) illustrate why it is never sufficient to rely on dictionaries or interpreters to communicate effectively. If your goal is to learn a different worldview, to understand different frames of reference, then learning and using the language in the field is essential.



Cross-Language Miscommunication 1.1

SHOWING UP EARLY

It was 7:30 a.m. and I was waiting, along with twelve American students and their two instructors, at the gate of a village school in northern Thailand. We were supposed to be volunteering at this school, and we were supposed to be meeting with the school's teachers to learn what tasks they were planning for us. Some of the students had not had breakfast yet, and all of us were decidedly groggy with jet lag. The representative of the nonprofit organization that funds the school had been very clear that our group needed to be at the gates of the school by 7:30 a.m. So here we were, as instructed—groggy, hungry, and perhaps even a little bit irritable—but no one was here to meet with us, and it didn't look as though anyone would be here soon. What to do? First I sent the study-abroad students back to their host families for some breakfast. Then I sat down to wait—alone—and to take notes. It was 8:30 when the village schoolteachers finally arrived and began their day with their morning flag-raising rituals. Because the students were no longer here, the planned meeting never took place.

What had happened? In Thailand there are at least two frames used to work with time. One frame is very much like the American frame that my students and colleagues and I are used to. University classes and formal appointments operate according to this frame. In this frame you show up at 7:30 a.m. for your 7:30 a.m. class. The other frame that often operates in Thailand is sometimes called “Thai time,” even by Thai people. It is more flexible about deadlines and about what “on time” means. I wasn't sure, in this first week of leading my study-abroad group, which of these two time frames the village school would be operating in, and there hadn't been time to ask. So I had decided to err on the side of caution and to work with the first time frame. As a result, I ended up with a real-life example for my American students about linguistic and cultural differences in thinking about time. It made for a great first day's lesson for the group.

JMSP

The strong emphasis on fieldwork in American anthropology traces its origins to the teachings of Franz Boas (1858–1942), the first professor of anthropology in the United States. When Boas first came to America from Germany in the late 1800s, many scholars in the United States were working to document and describe Native American languages and cultures. They were analyzing texts, word lists, and other linguistic data looking for clues about how the different native languages could be classified into family groupings. This was an extension of the kind of linguistic work that was already being done in Europe—the kind of work that led to the classification of French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, all of which had “descended” from Latin, into a single language family. It reflected the kind of evolutionary thinking that was dominant at the time. Many scholars of the day assumed that by classifying languages into groups they would also be classifying the people who spoke those languages into related groups, or cultures. Different cultures were thought to represent different levels of complexity from ancient beginnings to modern times, from early groups of hunters and gatherers to contemporary civilizations. It was even thought that cultures representing “earlier” levels were closer to nature and therefore closer to an ideal state that modern humans had drifted (or evolved) away from.

Boas, however, wasn’t sure that it was correct to classify cultures in terms of language. He also worried that the kinds of evolutionary theories and romantic writings that supported such classification were likely to lead to racist and nationalistic thinking. So when he published his *Handbook of American Indian Languages* in 1911, he wrote in the introduction about how difficult it was to find significant one-to-one correlations between race and culture, between language and culture, and between language and race. These early statements about the separability of language, race, and culture made an important contribution to early anthropology in the United States, taking the strong stance that it did against the growing racist and nationalistic sentiments of the time.

Boas did link language and culture in more subtle ways, however. Arguing that language played an important role in culture, he suggested that the study of language was an important part of cultural anthropology. He wrote that, because cultural anthropology (he called it “ethnology”) focused on people’s “mental life” (or worldview) and human language was “one of the most important manifestations of mental life,” the study of human language belonged “naturally to the field of work of ethnology” (Boas 1911, 63) or, in modern terms, “cultural anthropology.” He, therefore, taught his students that learning the language was an important part of learning a culture.

Boas also insisted that his students do extended fieldwork. Although by the turn of the twentieth century much interesting data had been collected about other cultures by European and American missionaries,