

Workshop

Linguistic Variation and cultural differentiation in North America

Wednesday 7 December 2016

190, avenue de France 75013 Paris
Salle du Conseil B

The workshop « Linguistic variation and cultural differentiation » aims to promote discussions between linguists and anthropologists concerning the comparison between models of cultural and linguistic variation in North America.

This workshop is organized by the LIAS- IMM as part of a research project SOURVA « Sources of cultural variation » founded by the ANR (Agence Nationale de la Recherche).

SOURVA is devoted to further our understanding of three models of cultural differentiation - the diffusionist model, the transformational model and the transactional model – and to gain a better insight into how they complement each other, and how they apply to the diversity of North American native languages and cultures.

Programme

9h: Welcoming
9h30: Introduction

Session I: Around Languages

10h: Marianne Mithun (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Parents and Neighbours: Genealogical and Social Relationships in the New World

11h: Carlo Severi (EHESS-LAS)
A reading of the Dakota Bible : Visual Parallelism and Ritual song

12h: Michel de Fornel (EHESS-IMM-LIAS)
Another look at the Athabaskan verb complex

Session II: Beyond the Languages

14h: Hugo Ferran (EHESS-IMM-LIAS)
The Musical Areas in question

15h: Marion Robinaud (EHESS-IMM-LIAS)
Kinship terminologies and catholicism in Subarctic

15h30: Emmanuel Désveaux (EHESS-IMM-LIAS)
Transformation of plastic forms

**Parents and Neighbours:
Genealogical and Social Relationships in the New World**

Marianne Mithun
University of California, Santa Barbara

North America is home to rich linguistic diversity, with nearly 300 languages, comprising 57 distinct families, indigenous to the territory north of Mexico. Much of the diversity is concentrated west of the Rockies. During the first half of the 20th century, hypotheses were proposed of deeper relationships among families in the West, grouping them into a few superstocks. Some of the evidence provided involved shared structural features. More recently it has been proposed that in general, structural features might be more stable through time than vocabulary. A closer look, however, shows the potentially profound effects of social and cultural factors on structure in situations of language contact. These factors, and their interplay with cognition, are varied and complex. Some key factors are whether those instigating change are first or second language speakers (language maintenance versus language shift), whether they learned their second language early or later in life, whether the languages in contact differ in prestige, and whether language mixture (code-switching) within a particular situation is encouraged or avoided. Such social and cultural factors are illustrated here in languages indigenous to the North American West.

A reading of the Dakota Bible : Visual Parallelism and Ritual song

Carlo Severi
EHESS-LAS

Based on the analysis of the so-called Dakota Bible of the Dahlem Museum in Berlin, we present an application of the concept of parallelism, generally used in the field of Linguistics, to iconography. A comparison with the pictographic autobiography of the Unkpapa Sioux Chief “Half Moon” will help to outline a general interpretation of this kind of picture-writing.

Another Look at the Athabaskan Verb Complex

Michel de Fornel
EHES-IMM-LIAS

The verb complex in all Athabaskan languages consists of a stem preceded by a large set of morphemic positions (and followed by a small set of suffixes). Since the first descriptions of Athabaskan languages (Goddard, 1905 (Hupa), Sapir, 1914 (Chasta Costa) and Hoijer, 1945 (Apache), etc.), the verb morphology of these languages has been described in terms of a template: in particular, the ordering of morphemes is controlled by a position class chart (Kari, 1989). The uniformity of the prefix positions across the languages encompasses the relative variation in the ordering of morphemes. This quasi-rigidity of the prefix morphology is easily detectable and no doubt explains why it has been possible to add new languages (for example, languages later described as members of the subgroup of Pacific Coast languages) to the first set of discovered languages (usually members of the subgroups of so-called Northern Athabaskan) without further need of demonstration or proof of genetic affiliation.

If the unity of the family has been evident, attempts to form coherent subgroups on the basis of *stammbaum* model or to establish a coherent chronology have not been very successful. Nevertheless, the stability of the Athabaskan family (or Dene family, if one add Eyak language) is quite remarkable. The questions we would like to raise are the following: how do we explain the unique blend of diversity and unity of a family that stretches from Alaska to Mexico? Is the unusual uniformity of the verb complex an important factor? If the answer is positive, is it better explained by postulating the arbitrary character of the morphology of the verb complex (as an analysis in terms of position class or templates seems to imply) or, on the contrary, by attempting to demonstrate its motivated character (if one admits ordering principles based, for example, on semantic scope (Rice, 2001)?

The Musical Areas in question

Hugo Ferran
EHESS-IMM-LIAS

In the field of North American Native studies, the question of musical areas has raised many debates and controversies. First considered as homogeneous (Hornbostel 1923), the native music of North America has been grouped into two ensembles (Herzog 1928) before being divided into five (Roberts 1936) and then six (Nettl 1953 and 1954) musical areas according to the chosen criteria. Beyond critics due to their essentialist, culturalist, synchronic or stylistic perspectives, these typological studies have been the subject of later developments and are now compiled in the form of several books (Erickson 1970, Heth 1992, Diamond *et al.* 1994), articles (Nettl 1969, Keeling 1992) and encyclopedic entries (Nettl *et al.* 1980, Heth *et al.* 1986, Levine & Nettl 2007).

These typologies are essentially based on sources of first hands which were collected by ethnographers, folklorists, (ethno)linguists and (ethno)musicologists from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. Restricted by the technological means of the time (recordings on wax cylinders and then on reels) and the lack of methods for field investigation and for data analysis (anthropology and ethnomusicology being in their early stages), the first researchers constituted a considerable corpus but difficult to exploit.

This talk aims at presenting the main difficulties that the ethnomusicologist is facing and proposes some lines of research to overcome these problems and to undertake an analysis and a comparison of the musical repertoires collected among different native groups. I will then venture to re-evaluate the existing typologies in the light of my initial analysis results. Ultimately, this research tends to show that the redefined musical areas intersect, to a certain extent, with the cultural and linguistic areas respectively uncovered by Kroeber (1939) and Voegelin & Voegelin (1965), but that they are no less autonomous and reveal interactions between neighboring groups, more or less remote, which could not be revealed otherwise.

Kinship terminologies and Catholicism in Subarctic

Marion Robinaud
EHESS-IMM-LIAS

This talk interrogates the kinship terminology of the First Nations in Subarctic area, and the marriage practices. In this case we can ask if it's the kinship terminologies which determine the marriage practices, or if it's the practices which determine the terminologies? We tend to think the terminologies as a matrix which influence the practice and the social organization.

We will propose a panorama of the kinship terminologies from the East to the West, from the Ojibwa near the Hudson Bay to the Salish of North-West Coast in transformational perspective. We will attempt to detect the torsions and inversions of neighbour terminologies, who constitute a global structure inside which one find its place, neither in coincidence nor under European influence, but in a logic transformational system.

These terminologies will be put in correlation with the exogamy and endogamy questions. These concepts resonate in the Christian European mind as a far away kinship degree between two potential marriage partners. But through the Native terminologies we will see that the preeminence of the consanguinity problem in European mind (under an important catholic influence), is completely reduce, even unknown, in the Native world of subarctic.

Transformation of plastic forms

Emmanuel Désveaux
EHESS-IMM-LIAS

At first glance, Native North America presents four main distinct clusters for art or plastic forms: abstract design on the East and the Subarctic; an association of feminine abstraction and masculine crude figuration on the Plains; a elegantly stylized figuration in the Southwest and proliferation of images based on principle of double-representation in combination with cartouched components on the Northwest Coast. However, this is not without counting with some minor clusters such as the zigzag pattern that prevails in Northern California.

First, it might be demonstrated that there are continuities between these well-identified clusters that seem apparently incompatible. Second, it will be show how these four different "artistic styles" are hold together in a transformational relationship, understood in the sense that Lévi-Strauss developed in *Les Mythologiques*. In other words, transformations proceed from inversions and are framed by signification... and we may conclude to the unity of North America on this level as on other levels of the culture (mythology, rites, kinship terminologies).

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