

LI JOURNAL OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH DISTINGUISHED LECTURE

Co-Sponsored by the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Bruce Mannheim

Professor of Anthropology, University of Michigan

[EVENTS SUBJECT TO COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS AT THE TIME; MASKS REQUIRED]

Thursday, Sept. 23, 7:30 p.m., UNM Anthropology Lecture Hall (Rm. 163)

MOTHER TONGUE, FATHER TONGUE, PLACE TONGUE:

21st CENTURY LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION & LANGUAGE SURVIVAL IN THE ANDES & AMAZON

While specialists in linguistic anthropology and in cognitive development have long since discarded the idea that language is merely or simply inherited from parent to child, drawing evidence from virtually all parts of the world, the imagery and ideology of parent-child transmission as the foremost or dominant mechanism persists among educators, international aid workers, agencies such as UNESCO, and even geneticists. The favored expression among educators and international aid workers, “mother tongue”, has been challenged by researchers in the Andes and the western Amazon of South America, who have observed that in marriages among speakers of two indigenous languages, the children adopt the language of their fathers, so “father tongue.” Similar phenomena have been observed elsewhere in the world. In the central Andes, though people speak to each other *and* to the places in which they live and work, under the right circumstances, the places speak back. So, to understand language transmission and persistence, we need to understand the ways in which people are connected to their communities and to the places through the languages of the place. There are some practical consequences. The languages in question are threatened with extinction; the response of educators and international agencies has concentrated on maintaining the languages through western institutions and among individuals, in the best of circumstances engaging communities in ensuring the survival of their languages. But the lesson of our transmission story for their communities in South America—and for their counterparts in the US Southwest— is that language survival is so intimately bound up with everyday cultural practices that it is bound to the survival of everyday social practices and thus to cultural and social sovereignty.

* * *

Specialized Seminar: Friday, Sept. 24, 2021, 12 noon, Anthropology Rm. 248

ANTHROPOLOGY AS A CONSILIENT SCIENCE: QUECHUA & ANCESTRAL INKA CASES

North American anthropology, since the beginning of the 20th century and as we currently practice it, is a compound discipline, defined by a partially overlapping set of problems that have reconfigured the relationships among its subfields continuously. Research that crossed subfields most often followed a model of “inter-disciplinarity” in which researchers worked on separately conceived problems and compared results. I advocate a different approach, *consilience*, in which a singularly conceived research question brings together evidence that nominally comes from different disciplines (or sub-disciplines) to study a single social phenomenon. The disciplines themselves exist primarily to organize research methodologies and scholarly communities, but do not define distinct objects of study. I’ll discuss two examples: (1) understanding human face-to-face social interaction in general and (2) understanding the process of world-making among southern Quechuas, including their Inka ancestors. Both examples are centered in anthropology, but spill over into other named disciplines, including (but not limited to) linguistics, cognitive science, and colonial Latin American history. I conclude with (admittedly utopian) implications for the future of the discipline.

* * *

Both events are free, open to the public and wheelchair-accessible. Unless you have a UNM permit, please park in a metered space to avoid a fine. The *Journal of Anthropological Research* has been published by the University of New Mexico since 1945. To subscribe, please visit journals.uchicago.edu/JAR.