Presented by the students and faculty of the Semiotics: Culture in Context workshop at the University of Chicago.
This program contains clickable links!

You can find more information about the conference, registration and history at: http://michicagoan2021.wordpress.com/

Many thanks to our sponsors: Franke Institute for the Humanities, Center for East-European and Russian/Eurasian Studies (CEERES), Center for Latin American Studies, University of Chicago Grad Council, and the Center for the Study of Communication and Society.
MAKING AUTHORITY, MULTIMODALLY

WITH A KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

LILLY IRANI

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION AND SCIENCE STUDIES,
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
THURSDAY MAY 6

1st PANEL

MAKING VOICES, VOICING SUBJECTS

3:00 PM - 4:45 PM  |  p. 4
Rafadi Hakim
Dejan Durić
Myungji Lee
Clayton Van Woerkom
Jiarui Sun

DISCUSSANT:
E. Summerson Carr

2nd PANEL

IL/LEGITIMACY

5:00 PM - 6:30 PM  |  p. 8
Nikolina Zenovic
Grigory Gorbun
Jessica R. Storey-Nagy
Kit Ginzky

DISCUSSANT:
Elizabeth Mertz

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

IN MEMORY OF MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN

6:30 PM - 7:00 PM

The first day of presentations will conclude with an informal roundtable conversation remembering Mr. S., his contributions to the Michicagoan conference and our community of scholars. The conference’s originating faculty and former students — Professors Sue Gal, Judy Irvine, Bruce Mannheim, Webb Keane, Chris Ball (a student at Chicago in the first years), and Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway (student at Michigan) — will begin the first 30 minutes.

All are welcome to stay beyond the 30 min scheduled time.

MODERATOR:
E. Summerson Carr
FRIDAY MAY 7

3rd PANEL | 12:30 PM - 2:15 PM | p. 12
SENSING PERSONAE
Rachel Howard
Cody Boukather
Randeep Hothi
Zachary Lazarus
James Meador

DISCUSSANT:
Elise Kramer

KEYNOTE | 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM | p. 16
LILLY IRANI

4th PANEL | 4:15 PM - 5:45 PM | p. 18
(RE)MAKING THE PAST, ENACTING THE PRESENT
Yukun Zeng
Niku T’arhechu T’arhesi
Emily Kuret
Feng Ye

DISCUSSANT:
Kristina Wirtz

HAPPY HOUR | 6:00 - 7:30 PM
online at GATHER.TOWN

SATURDAY MAY 8

5th PANEL | 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM | p. 21
CHANNELING (RE)ACTION
Wee Yang Soh
Katie Dimmery
Anna-Marie Sprenger
Ozge Korkmaz

DISCUSSANT:
Constantine Nakassis

6th PANEL | 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM | p. 25
LAYERING KNOWLEDGES
Sheng Long
Anna Whitney
Hannah Norwood
Kenzell Huggins

DISCUSSANT:
Ilana Gershon

7th PANEL | 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM | p. 29
PRESENCING BOUNDARIES
Christopher Bloechl
Aron Marie
Jennifer Sierra

DISCUSSANT:
Barbra Meek
1st PANEL

THURS
3:00 PM - 4:45 PM CST

MAKING VOICES, VOICING SUBJECTS

DISCUSSANT: E. Summerson Carr

Associate Professor, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, and Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago
"Now, We Can Help Ourselves": Voice, Gender, and Modalities of Entrepreneurship in Eastern Indonesia

Rafadi Hakim
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

"Podjela u glavi" (Divisions in [our] heads): The Dialogics of Ethnic Stance in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dejan Durić
PhD Student, Departments of American Culture and Anthropology, University of Michigan

Enactment of Authority Through Differentiation: the Preacher as the State-Sponsored Guide to the "Right Path" of Islam in Secular Turkey

Myungji Lee
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Pious Progressives: Voicing Mormon-Cosmopolitan Subjectivity in Provo, Utah

Clayton Van Woerkom
Incoming Master’s Student, Department of Anthropology, Brigham Young University

Flooding Patriotic Passion: The Semiotics of Live-Commentary Surge in the Chinese Animation Year, Hare, Affair

Jiarui Sun
PhD student, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
NOW, WE CAN HELP OURSELVES:

Voice, Gender, and Modalities of Entrepreneurship in Eastern Indonesia

RAFADI HAKIM
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Activists and organizers have been ethnographically studied as those who cultivate discursive genres that are recognized as efficacious and authoritative by their addressees (e.g. Cody 2013; Greenberg 2014). Similarly, in Kupang, a rural locale in eastern Indonesia, NGO-based organizers, pendamping (lit. “companion”), mediate the voices of rural women’s collectives, kelompok dampingan (lit. “companion group”), across two ideological fields: (1) authoritative state discourses of entrepreneurial development, and (2) Christian notions of gender and agentive personhood. The pendamping, for instance, spends a large amount of their time encouraging women to rear pigs as a source of cash income, or to open kiosks to sell local produce. In this paper, I will analyze the pendamping’s practices of encouragement as multimodal voicing strategies that my interlocutors define as the “language of empowerment” (bahasa pemberdayaan). While Indonesian feminist NGOs ostensibly organize collectives to empower rural women through entrepreneurial means, these collectives are also inseparable from state authorities that disburse funding and other entrepreneurial modalities for these NGOs. Thus, the pendamping also performs crucial roles as political mediators. In particular, the pendamping performs speech genres that rely upon strategies of double-voicing (c.f. Bakhtin 1986): they simultaneously voice the acute financial needs of the women’s entrepreneurial collectives and authoritative entrepreneurial ideals endorsed by local bureaucrats, who are mostly men. My aim in this paper is to demonstrate how the pendamping voices “empowerment” as politically efficacious genres of speech that simultaneously transforms and reproduces gendered forms of inequality.

PODJELA U GLAVI (DIVISIONS IN [OUR] HEADS):

The Dialogics of Ethnic Stance in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

DEJAN DURIĆ
PhD Student, American Culture and Anthropology, University of Michigan

Gimanazija Mostar (Gymnasium Mostar) is one of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s renowned and academically prestigious secondary education institutions operating under two separate secondary school curricula in two completely mutually intelligible language varieties, Bosnian and Croatian. The right to be educated in one’s mother tongue has become, as Curtis ford Curtis Ford (2002, 354) argues, code “when open calls for segregated schooling would have been unacceptable to the international community.” The school has become a symbol of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s fragile post-war democracy. Azra Hromadzic (2008, 96), for instance, describes the school as embodying “the paradoxical spirit of the Dayton Peace Agreement, where simultaneous segregation...and unification...of citizens take place.” Integrational efforts, funded by international stakeholders and largely welcomed by students, have done little to change the reality of the situation: in 2021, The Gymnasium Mostar is still an ethnically segregated school.

Gimanazija Mostar is an especially interesting space where the authoritative logic of ethnic difference is mediated through the everyday lives of students and teachers. While ethnicity might present itself as an authoritative “essence,” neatly dividing the school in two halves—Croat and Bosnian—, this paper takes ethnic difference to be an emergent property swept up in the semiotics of authority and resistance. As such this paper explores how ethnic difference, as a discursive property, emerges when students take stances (Du Bois 2007) in relation to shadow conversations (Irvine 1996; Mannheim and Van Vleet 1998). For example, a recurring phrase that students use, namely that some people in Mostar live with podjela u glavi (divisions in [their] heads), helps them animate an “older generation” that has lived through the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and still lives with these divisions in their heads. This animated older generation is a key point for stance taking in conversation. Students thus draw on an array of semiotic resources to take complex ethnic stances which are ultimately emergent properties of discursive interactions.

ENACTMENT OF AUTHORITY THROUGH DIFFERENTIATION:

The Preacher as the State-Sponsored Guide to the “Right Path” of Islam in Secular Turkey

MYUNGJI LEE
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

This paper explores how the figure of the state preacher (vaiz) is characterized as the cardinal bureaucratic agent who is authorized to lead the people onto the “right path” of Islam. In modern Turkey, where all religious functionaries are subsumed under the secular state, the preachers consist of a
special echelon of the local administrations of religious affairs. Their vocation to preach, educate, and answer religious questions is ranked higher than that of imams assigned to every mosque to lead people in prayer. Therefore, holding a preachership requires higher qualifications, and the number of its holders remains much smaller than that of staff in lower echelons. Interestingly, many of the circulars sent from the Headquarters of the Directorate of Religious Affairs to its local administrations in the 1940s aimed to regiment the preachers’ daily activities, while the imams’ service is rarely discussed with the same degree of attention. What makes the preachers such an important figure for the Turkish bureaucracy of religious affairs? This paper presents some of the 1940s Turkish circulars and state documents to investigate the semiotic processes of differentiation that discursively figure the preachers as a peculiarly authoritative agent of the state. In analyzing the processes of differentiation, I focus on how the teleological image of the “right path” (doğru yol) is mobilized to enact the authority of both the preachers and the state as their sponsor, justifying the secular state’s intervention in people’s religious lives.

PIOUS PROGRESSIVES:

Voicing Mormon-Cosmopolitan Subjectivity in Provo, Utah

CLAYTON VAN WOERKOM

Incoming Master’s Student, Department of Anthropology, Brigham Young University

In this paper, I discuss a humorous form of voicing called Brian Voice (BV) used by a group of college students (including myself), all of whom are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Bringing the tools and methods of linguistic anthropology together with the anthropology of morality (esp. Ordinary Ethics), I demonstrate the ways this voicing is used to simultaneously inhabit two seemingly contradictory subjectivities of, on the one hand, a reverent Mormon and, on the other, a modern cosmopolitan. More specifically, I explore how BV allows its speakers to integrate their progressive political subjectivity within a socially conservative religion typically aligned with the political right, thus creating a safe space for the formation, by opposition, of a subjectivity that is simultaneously cosmopolitan-progressivist and pious-Mormon. BV facilitates the creation of this subjectivity by enabling speakers to voice both irreverence and anti-cosmopolitanism without incurring the normal social consequences associated with those stances. I contend that BV accomplishes this mitigation of negative consequences through indexing ridiculousness and absurdity. By situating BV within its Mormon context, I demonstrate that in distancing speakers from both hyper-reverence and irreverence, BV entails a practical engagement with the ethics, principles, and ideals of both Mormon morality and cosmopolitan morality, thus allowing speakers to inhabit a simultaneously Mormon and cosmopolitan self. In sum, this paper demonstrates the importance of considering language in the study of the relationship between religious and political subjectivity.

FLOODING PATRIOTIC PASSION:

The Semiotics of Live-Commentary Surge in the Chinese Animation Year, Hare, Affair

JIARUI SUN

PhD Student, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department, University of Chicago

In the age of digital media, how do technologies complicate the constitution of the authority of nationalist discourses? In this paper, I explore this question by examining the semiotic processes in the making of nationalist discourses via digital media. Specifically, I focus on viewers’ live-commentaries to Chinese animation series Year, Hare, Affair (2015–2019), which uses cartoon animals to illustrate a nationalist narrative of modern Chinese history. What distinguishes this animation from traditional propaganda is the abundant live-comments generated by viewers of this show.

On the whole, my paper argues, the technological design of the webtool live-commentary provides material conditions to interpellate viewers as nation-loving subjects. I first introduce three prominent features of live-commentary: pseudo-synchronicity, anonymity, and the double vision of reading and seeing. These features facilitate the system’s preference for particular kinds of text, which is manifested in overwhelmingly repetitive comment “curtains.” I then identify three types of such “curtains.” The first are texts offered by the video, which makes it easy for commenters to reproduce in large amount. By inviting users to augment the video’s message, such comments makes users feel empowered. The second are quotes already metapragmatically typified as nationalistic. In a process of rhematization, the intensity of these two “curtains” are picked up by participants as the overwhelming passion of nationalist subjects. The third type are comments about crying, which both recognize the animation’s affective interpellation of viewers as feeling subjects, and, in their juxtaposition with other words, validify such feelings as proper for nationalist subjects.
IL/LEGITIMACY

2ND PANEL

THURS
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM CST

DISCUSSANT: Elizabeth Mertz

John and Rylla Bosshard Professor of Law Emerita, University of Wisconsin Law School;
Senior Research Faculty, American Bar Foundation, Chicago, Illinois;
Lichtstern Distinguished Research Scholar in Residence, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago
Smurfing Resistance: Citationality in Protests Against the 2019 Montenegrin Law on Religion

Nikolina Zenovic  
*Masters of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS), University of Chicago*

Is Legal Authority Authoritarian? Decoupling Law and Liberalism in Contemporary Russia

Grigory Gorbun  
*PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago*

Billboards and Circus: Linguistic Landscape Authority, and Legitimacy in Budapest’s 2019 Municipal Elections

Jessica R. Storey-Nagy  
*PhD Candidate, Department of Central Eurasian Studies (Hungarian Studies), Indiana University Bloomington*

“Invitation To a Career [Of Oppression]”: Transtemporal Propaganda in the Social Work Archive

Kit Ginzky  
*PhD Student, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago*
SMURFING RESISTANCE:

Citationality in Protests Against the 2019 Montenegrin Law on Religion

NIKOLINA ZENOVIC

Masters of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS), University of Chicago

The image of the smurf has recently been invoked in Montenegrin Serbs’ discourses opposing the 2019 Montenegrin law on religion. The smurf has made its way from classroom drawings in Montenegro’s capital, Podgorica, to discussions of potential smurf-themed protests here in the United States. Through social media forms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Viber, the smurf’s image has circulated in resistance to the Montenegrin law, and in some instances, as forms of Serbian Montenegrin’s resistance to Montenegrin hegemony. The smurf, with its colors resembling those of the Serbian flag and its symbolization of resistance to a more powerful force, has been taken up in this politicized context. This paper will address how the image-texts of protests against the Montenegrin law are mediated and circulated in Montenegro and the United States. What is being created through these circulations across different geographic contexts? What is being cited in this protest? If the smurf is being brought into citation, what is this image doing for the movement, and what is being erased by such a citation? In analyzing such image-texts, this paper will work with understandings of mediation, circulation, citationality, and erasure to discuss the intertextuality of protests against the Montenegrin law. As these protests are relatively recent, this paper will look at circulation in action in both Montenegro and amongst empathizers or critics abroad.

IS LEGAL AUTHORITY AUTHORITARIAN?

Decouplings Law and Liberalism in Contemporary Russia

GRIGORY GORBUN

PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

In the context of postsocialist societies the ‘rule of law’ has long been considered a central element of the so-called transition from an authoritarian past to the liberal future (Czarnota, Krygier, Sadurski 2005), while professional lawyers have been portrayed as a major force of opposition to authoritarianism even inside authoritarian regimes (Kisilowski 2015). However, some recent studies have questioned this narrative showing that strengthening legal mechanisms and the ascendance of professional lawyers to power don’t always bring political liberalization (Scheppel 2019). This paper furthers the criticism of the assumed role of law and legal professionals in the authoritarian/liberal dichotomy by thinking with two odd phenomena from contemporary Russia. First it will look at a moot court on constitutional law for undergraduate law students. Organizers and judges of this competition are lawyers from the opposite ends of the Russian political spectrum finding common (legal) language in the midst of a heated public discussion around a constitutional reform. Then the paper will turn to the practices of talking to the representatives of authorities developed by a group of legal dissidents calling themselves ‘USSR citizens’. ‘USSR citizens’ use a quasi-legal register relying on the “authoritarian” character of legal discourse (Dent 2019) to claim the illegitimacy of the Russian state and legal regime in occasionally successful attempts to avoid paying petty fines and utility bills. These examples challenge the simplistic model of authoritarianism and make us reassess our understanding of the political role of law.

BILLBOARDS AND CIRCUS:

Linguistic Landscape, Authority, and Legitimacy in Budapest’s 2019 Municipal Elections

JESSICA R. STOREY-NAGY

PhD Candidate, Department of Central Eurasian Studies (Hungarian Studies), Indiana University Bloomington

This paper examines the linguistic landscape of Budapest leading up to and following the October 2019 municipal elections, when in a rather unexpected turn, Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz lost the support of Hungary’s capital, along with ten other major cities. Fidelitas, the youth organization supporting Fidesz, ran multiple smear campaigns against most non-Fidesz candidates in which members of opposing parties were depicted as characters in a circus act. However, in Budapest’s public spaces emerged a dialogue which questioned not only the legitimacy of opposition politicians, but one which questioned the authority of Fidesz politicians and political institutions at all levels in Hungary. While urban public spaces made visible Fidesz’ multifaceted power and its heavy presence in public life, they also made visible the encroaching power of the opposition, smaller civic organizations, and the concerns of many disgruntled individuals. Texts and non-verbal imagery in public spaces that addressed
scandal involving mayoral candidates and the overwhelming commonality of smear campaigns, contributed to the loss of political and moral authority for politicians the country over, and had an especially detrimental effect on Fidesz’ election outcome. This study addresses not only the temporally bound multimodal nature of signs and how space organizes semiotic regimes, but also documents how individuals and groups in public spaces make meaning with and in their urban landscape.

“INVITATION TO A CAREER [OF OPPRESSION]”:

Trans-temporal Propaganda in the Social Work Archive

KIT GINZKY

PhD Student, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice,
University of Chicago

HathiTrust hosts two digital copies of a 1953 pamphlet titled Social Work as a Profession, produced from two physical copies held at the University of Michigan Social Work Library. Cataloged as “vocational guidance,” the booklet was published by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body of schools of social work, and underwritten by the National Committee on Social Work in Defense Mobilization. Copy #2 is a “clean” rendering of the original publication, but Copy #1 was systematically marked up by someone—likely a University of Michigan social work student affiliated with the New Left—between 1971 (Attica) and 1974 (Watergate). This paper contextualizes the defaced Copy #1 and uses the object to explore questions of interdiscursivity, im/materiality, temporality, and constructions of authority in the digital archive. Retitled Social Work as a Profession [in Amerikkka] by the anonymous interlocutor, the inscriptions stage a discourse between CSWE’s professional vision for a regulated, educated, middle class labor force and the New Left’s projects of anti-imperialism, sexual liberation, and anti-capitalism. In some cases, asterisks and subtle in-line annotations are used to shift the denotational text: “Invitation To a Career [Of Oppression].” At other moments, paragraphs are more directly defaced; speech bubbles are added to illustrations, projecting text into the minds and tongues of depicted social workers. This dialogic exchange between 1950s professional authority and 1970s professional in-training crosses temporal boundaries; by overlaying their revolutionary propaganda atop existing institutionally legible propaganda, our provocateur’s message was entered into and preserved by an institution of authority while remaining relatively covert.

THURS    6:30 PM - 7:00 PM CST

ROUNDTABLE:

REMEMBERING MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN

The first day of presentations will conclude with an informal roundtable conversation remembering Mr. S., his contributions to the Michicagoan conference and our community of scholars. The conference’s originating faculty and former students — Professors Sue Gal, Judy Irvine, Bruce Mannheim, Webb Keane, Chris Ball (student UChi), and Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway (student UMich) — will begin the first 30 minutes.

All are welcome to stay beyond the 30 min scheduled time.

The roundtable will be moderated by E. Summerson Carr,
Associate Professor,
Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, and Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Please write to Emily Kuret (kuret@uchicago.edu) with questions.
3rd PANEL

FRI
12:30 PM - 2:35 PM CST

SENSING PERSONAE

DISCUSSANT: Elise Kramer

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Maverick Authority: Political Personae in Arizona

Rachel Howard
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Freak Out the Squares: The Semiotic Production of American Biker Identities and the Preservation of an “Abject”

Cody Boukather
Masters of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS), University of Chicago

Authority, Chorus, and Sequence: Sikh Greeting Routines at Diasporic Television Stations

Randeep Hothi
PhD Candidate, Departments of Anthropology and Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan

Making Art Therapy Multicultural: Ideologies of Image and Identity

Zachary Lazarus
PhD Student, Department of Anthropology and the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago

Authority’s Bad Desires: The Social Life of Bouletic Emblems

James Meador
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan
MAVERICK AUTHORITY:

Political Personae in Arizona

RACHEL HOWARD
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

It was a tiny gesture, watched by millions. For countless Americans who relied on the Affordable Care Act, it was a moment of hope; but also, a reminder of how easily the scale could have tipped towards desperation. Arizona Senator John McCain’s thumbs-down during the 2017 consequential vote on the legality of the ACA was a headline moment for his political career—his last major vote before he died, a little over a year later. Admiring journalists and fans noted the thumbs-down gesture as part of his “maverick” legacy, built up by behaving in ways that appeared to buck his party’s line. The maverick political persona has a long history in Arizona politics, a state in which political aspirations have historically been linked to the attraction of Anglo migrant wealth and support. In this paper, I consider the way maverick authority is contingent upon the social identities of those who vote “mavericks” into office in the state—mostly white, mostly older, mostly recent residents. I ask: What are the aspirational and aesthetic political qualities of maverick authority? And what makes it so seductive? How is maverick authority made across political parties and through interdiscursive interactions between voters, politicians, and political observers? This paper is an early attempt to think through the implicit conversation between Arizona politicians and their voters.

FREAK OUT THE SQUARES:

The Semiotic Production of American Biker Identities and the Preservation of an “Abject”

CODY BOUKATHER
Masters of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS), University of Chicago

This paper examines the political dimensions of linguistic and semiotic preservation as it relates to race, gender, and class among contemporary bikers within the United States. Propelled by the biker colloquialism “freak out the squares” used to draw boundaries of ideological difference, I investigate the embodiment of this prominent attitude within the aesthetic, material, and language practices of a subcultural group of bikers who preserve a style of choppers (custom motorcycle) that originated in the post-WW2 and countercultural eras. This style historically has authored mainstay American biker ideologies and its authentication has become evident through the lower-class cultural production of motorcycles, magazines, dress, and language that reproduce sexist, racist, and xenophobic ideologies. While this style paints bikers as stereotypically white, male, libertarian, and violent, the current communities who preserve these cultural forms aren’t always necessarily so. In response, I investigate this biker drive to shock and scare within the terms of abjection as approached by Julia Kristeva. I use ethnographic material to discuss what role abjection holds within the sexist, racist, and xenophobic linguistic and semiotic practices of this cultural style. I theorize abjection as a register itself that can be motivated by ideologies of class, nation, and liberty. In theorizing abjection as belonging to some sort of linguistic and semiotic register, I aim to reinterpret the pragmatic and metapragmatic functions that white supremacist and misogynist practices hold for those who engage in this authoritative biker style.

AUTHORITY, CHORUS, AND SEQUENCE:

Sikh Greeting Routines at Diasporic Television Stations

RANDEEP HOTHI
PhD Candidate, Departments of Anthropology and Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan

Sikhs are increasingly institutionalizing a conversational opening specific to the Khalsa, a military order instituted by the tenth and final living human guru of the Sikhs. This opening consists in manual co-speech gesture, a clasping of the hands and the saying, “Waheguru
Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh (The Khalsa is of the One, to the One all Victory).” On Sikh television stations, these greetings must deal with the complexities of multi-modality — not all programs are of the same genre, and not all interactants are face-to-face. Sikhs must consequently perform this greeting creatively, depending on the constraints at hand. My study examines how these manual co-speech conversational openings remain intelligible in spite of their variation, and how these variations can index the context of their performance including the authority of its performers. In doing so, I draw on over two years of ethnographic data at Sikh television stations based in England and India.

MAKING ART THERAPY MULTICULTURAL:

Ideologies of Image and Identity

ZACHARY LAZARUS

PhD Student, Department of Anthropology and the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago

In 1990, the American Art Therapy Association responded to accusations of Eurocentrism by forming a committee to advance multiculturalism. In this paper, I analyze the art therapy literature on best practices for cultural competence. These texts instruct art therapists on how to recognize “cultural difference,” tailor therapeutic interventions for members of particular cultural groups, and minimize their own cultural biases. “Culture,” in this context, is understood as an aspect of identity that may mediate or constrain communication and is often used interchangeably with “ethnicity” and “race.” Art therapy is characterized as well-suited for clinical situations in which the therapist’s and client’s identities differ because its pragmatic efficacy relies on images rather than words. I argue that these accounts, which ideologically figure art as essentially a mode of communication, establish a gap between linguistic and nonlinguistic practices and erase art’s multimodal and indexical properties. I suggest that in attending to difference by interpreting art’s aesthetic qualities as indexical icons of ethnic and racial identity, art therapists authorize arts’ imputed capacity to act as a bridge between cultures and its promise to create a multicultural profession.

AUTHORITY’S BAD DESIRES:

The Social Life of Bouletic Emblems

JAMES MEADOR

PhD student, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

The concept of “authority” is cursed by its need for support, and for support of more than one sort. Bakhtin introduced “authoritative discourse” in concert with “internally persuasive discourse” to suggest that ideological coherence emerges through “The struggle and dialogical interrelationship of these categories” (1981:342). Here, I seek to shed light on this dialectic of authority and persuasion through analytical attention to the semiotics of deontic and bouletic modality (grammatical markers of duty and desire, like English should and want). Elaborating Bakhtin’s proposal, attention to the co-regimentation of these semiotic forms and their multimodal virtualizations reveals them to be key construction sites for the work of ideological coherence. Here I seek to highlight some of the uses of stereotyped desire in particular. By way of example, I show how an authoritative patriarchal morality (re)articulated itself around the stereotype of the “gold-worshipping girl” (拜金女) across the PRC media landscape in the 2010s, a figure defined by her misguided and blame-worthy preference for status and wealth at the expense of human relationships and her own happiness. The reach and persistence of this stereotype over the past decade testifies to the cultural significance of stigmatized bouletic emblems as portable targets for cueing moral censure, and thus as stalking horses for moralities lurking in the shallows of interdiscursive “tradition.”
FRI  2:30 PM - 4:00 PM CST

KEYNOTE ADDRESS:

LILLY IRANI

Associate Professor,
Department of Communication and Program in Science Studies,
University of California, San Diego (UCSD)
Lilly Irani is an Associate Professor of Communication & Science Studies at University of California, San Diego. She also serves as faculty in the Design Lab, Institute for Practical Ethics, the program in Critical Gender Studies, and sits on the Academic Advisory Board of AI Now (NYU). She is author of Chasing Innovation: Making Entrepreneurial Citizens in Modern India (Princeton University Press, 2019) and Redacted (with Jesse Marx) (Taller California, 2021). Chasing Innovation has been awarded the 2020 International Communication Association Outstanding Book Award and the 2019 Diana Forsythe Prize for feminist anthropological research on work, science, or technology, including biomedicine. Her research examines the cultural politics of high-tech work and the counter-practices they generate, as both an ethnographer, a designer, and a former technology worker. She is a co-founder of the digital worker advocacy organization Turkopticon. Her work has appeared at ACM SIGCHI, New Media & Society, Science, Technology & Human Values, South Atlantic Quarterly, and other venues. She sits on the Editorial Committee of Public Culture and on the Editorial Advisory Boards of New Technology, Work, and Employment and Design and Culture. She has a Ph.D. in Informatics from University of California, Irvine.
4th PANEL

FRI
4:15 PM - 5:45 PM CST

(Re)Making the Past, Enacting the Present

Discussant: Kristina Wirtz
Department Chair and Professor, Department of Spanish, Western Michigan University
The Talkability of Dao: Metapragmatic Scaffolding and Radical Moralization

Yukun Zeng
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Whose Ethnonym? P’urhépecha Not Tarascan/Tarasco!

Niku T’arhechu T’arhesi
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

The Ancient, Again (and Again): Ekphrastic Textuality and the View from Inside Salvatori’s 3D-Printed “Big Head” of David

Emily Kuret
PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Language ideologies in translation: debates around literary translation in late Qing and early Republican China

Feng Ye
PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago
THE TALKABILITY OF DAO:

Metapragmatic Scaffolding and Radical Moralization

YUKUN ZENG
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology,
University of Chicago

Dujing is an educational movement popular in mainland China. Literally denotating reading (du) classics (jing), dujing promotes reading classics repetitiously without understanding, digesting perennial wisdom inside classics across different civilization instead of gaining temporary knowledge in ordinary books. Dao is the colloquial yet sublime term for perennial wisdom in Chinese language. The authority of dao, is established and sustained by its untalkability, as the famous epithet of Dao De Jing tells us. This paper analyzes the discourse of dujing promotion. Focusing on how Dao, the fetishized wisdom that is highly meaningful for dujing promoters, can be talkable and used to persuade parents to send their children to dujing institutes, I will show how the Daoist taboo to talk about Dao is transformed into Confucian practice to fervently talk about Dao, metapragmatically scaffolding a radical moral stance to engage dujing.

WHOSE ETHNONYM?

P’urhépecha Not Tarascan/Tarasco!

NIKU T’ARHECHU T’ARHESI
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology,
University of Michigan

From government cadres to educational policymakers, agents aligned with the state have read certain linguistic practices as indexing national allegiance and demonstrating progress. This uncritical reading of social action erases the intricacies of linguistically mediated communication on many levels: from how people perceive and conceptualize the world to the ways people imbue the world with various, sometimes conflicting, meanings. This paper analyzes a site of conflicting meanings that generates a reciprocal yet asymmetrical relationship between subjects and objects. In doing so, it considers a debate centered on an ethnonym in Mesoamerican research. The power to name is a battle site over dominion with repercussions over projected pasts and futures.

THE ANCIENT, AGAIN (AND AGAIN):

Ekphrastic Textuality and the View from Inside Salvatori’s 3D Printed “Big Head” of David

EMILY KURET
PhD Student, Department of Anthropology,
University of Chicago

Re-presentations of Michelangelo’s David of the Italian Renaissance, itself citational of an awesome ancient (Greek) past, circulate widely as rhematic icons of a true, sublime human creativity, often bringing the statue to the brink of kitsch. In this paper, I discuss how cultural qualisigns of value (Chumley 2017) and gradations of intensity (Kockelman 2016), discursively formed and reformed in moments of admiration, are shifted in the work of contemporary Greek and Italian artists through the art’s ekphrastic texture. I define Ekphrastic textuality as a sort of aesthetic textuality that coheres as a form of mimesis, voicing a silent image while attempting to overcome the power of the image by transforming and inscribing it (Elsner 2007). By looking closely at “Il Grande Testone,” and “Testone”, recent works by artist Andrea Salvatori, I discuss how 3D printing facilitates an ekphrastic intervention by which the artist comments upon the experience of putative inheritors of the ancient through a re-presentation of the ancient itself. Re-casting David as an act of care, Salvatori remarks upon the quotidian structures of qualia — the ancient sublime and the phenomenological experience (and health) of the modern Italians and Greeks — that cotextualize each other. This paper is a first attempt to think about how authoritative, pervasive forms, such as “the sublime,” are downgraded in artmaking interactions. Specifically, I look to ekphrasis as a way to analyze how and when representations of privileged cultural forms are suspended, transformed and drawn into relationship with other qualities of “good” (such as mental and physical well-being).
In late Qing and early Republican China, literary translation became an important site of linguistic experimentation as well as heated debates over the political and historical legitimacy of different forms of the (written) Chinese language. Exploring how translation mediated language reform, this paper compares the work of a few influential translator-writers: Lin Shu, arguably the most commercially successful literary translator who practiced “tandem translation” and wrote or translated in a particular style of “Classical Chinese,” and intellectuals associated with the “New Culture” movement, who wrote and translated in a new phonocentric national language, “Vernacular Chinese.” Conducting close-readings of such writers’ translation works, metacommentary on translation, theorizations of the “Chinese language,” as well as their debates with each other, I try to examine: 1. How different language-textual ideologies mediated their drastically different approaches to literary translation; 2. How those language-textual ideologies emerged in debates as well as more implicit processes of differentiation between those who translated in “Vernacular Chinese” and those who translated in “Classical Chinese” (Or, how the categories “vernacular Chinese” and “Classical Chinese” were constructed in the first place in debates around translation); 3. How the legitimation of certain methods of translation and ways of writing “Chinese” helped articulate particular modes of political and historical authority via processes of rhematization.

The paper is also itself a translation exercise, as I rely on my own literary translations of Chinese translations to conduct analysis—translation is not only ethnographic metaphor, but an integral part of analytic work. How might we think about our “translation” as we engage with and in a wide range of semiotic modalities?
CHANNELING (RE)ACTION

5th PANEL

SAT
9:00 AM - 10:30 AM CST

DISCUSSANT: Constantine Nakassis

Associate Professor, Departments of Anthropology, Cinema and Media Studies, and Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago

Wee Yang Soh
PhD Student, Department of Anthropology,
University of Chicago

How to Banish Ghosts and Gobsmack people: Reciting Poetry Across Worlds in Southwest China

Katie Dimmery
PhD Candidate, Departments of Anthropology and Asian Languages and Cultures,
University of Michigan

Enregisterment and Parody of a Romanian Politician’s Speech

Anna-Marie Sprenger
PhD Student, Department of Linguistics,
University of Chicago

Epistemic Anxieties: Reflections on Authority and Ethics in an Out-of-the-way Place in Kurdistan

Ozge Korkmaz
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology,
University of Michigan
TRANSNATIONAL VISUAL ECONOMIES:

Enregistering Practices of Looking Through K-pop Reaction Videos

WEE YANG SOH

PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

In this paper, I am concerned with how K-pop is entextualized and de/recontextualized transnationally by focusing on the semiotic labor of YouTube reaction videos. By analyzing a popular reaction video of BlackPink’s 2020 hit ‘How You Like That’ by New York-based a capella group r!Verse, I show how K-pop reaction videos engender modalities of seeing that render a culturally and linguistically foreign image-text intelligible. Through K-pop reaction videos, K-pop, a rapidly evolving genre with its own unique history, language and politics, is made understandable, accessible, and therefore (re)citable as a semiotic resource to non-Koreans residing in other countries.

HOW TO BANISH GHOSTS AND GOBSMACK PEOPLE:

Reciting Poetry Across Worlds in Southwest China

KATIE DIMMERY

PhD Candidate, Departments of Anthropology and Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan

In much of “ethnic” Yunnan—areas of former non-Chinese polities in P.R. China’s southwest—specially-trained bbv, or reciters, use conventionalized sets of visually iconic signs to hand-write books, and thence to convert the graphic configurations (“text artifacts”) into poetic speech and dance during ceremonies. While much linguistic anthropological research investigates the ways that reading aloud participates in human interaction, this paper considers (1) the engagement between reader and written text as itself interaction-like (insofar as it is dialogic and emergent) and (2) the interdiscursivity between the two interactional worlds, that of (a) the ritualist’s
private engagement with his book, and (b) his production of spoken and bodily text for a human audience. Focusing on how the act of recitation bridges these worlds by enacting a skillful shift of modalities from graphic entanglement to poetic-speech-and-dance, I argue that recitational authority—a reciter’s efficacy and persuasiveness—derives precisely from his embodied mediation of worlds.

ENREGISTERMENT AND PARODY OF A ROMANIAN POLITICIAN’S SPEECH

ANNA-MARIE SPRENGER

PhD Student, Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago

In sociolinguistic literature, parodic performances have been a means to study enregisterment (Sclafani 2012), providing insight into the salience of features associated with communities of speakers (Pratt & D’Onofrio 2017, Hall 2019). Due to the genre’s exaggerative nature, the parodic imitation of a speaker can function as a linguistic snapshot of how the speaker is heard or voiced (Bahktin 1981). Expanding on this work, this study examines how parody enregisters an overall political persona for Viorica Dăncilă, former Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) leader, whose speech has been widely criticized. Analyzing Dăncilă’s speeches from 2019, I show that her rate of glide insertion is very low (2.3%), but parodists represent her rate as much higher (50.0%), occurring in a wider range of linguistic environments. Despite low rates of glide insertion, the feature has become emblematic of Dăncilă’s political persona. I argue that the political ideologies of a surrounding community of practice influence the enregisterment of features (Agha 2003), connecting this pattern to Romanian political ideologies surrounding the PSD and linking Dăncilă’s glide insertion to the social-semiotic landscape (Eckert 2019) of the Communist era. As the PSD party is linked to the Communist party in the historical memory of Romanians (Hogea 2010; Ghergina & Jiglău 2011, Shafir 2008), Dăncilă’s imagined use of glide insertion is interpreted intertextually with Communist-era dictator Ceaușescu, who is stereotyped as using the feature. Treating parodists as kinds of listening subjects (Inoue 2003), I discuss how these listening subjects’ ideologies influence the enregisterment of features to individuals.

EPISTEMIC ANXIETIES:

Reflections on Authority and Ethics in an Out-of-the-way Place in Kurdistan

OZGE KORKMAZ

PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

For its inhabitants, the Bahçesaray district of Van Province, a small town of 15,000 people in Turkey’s predominantly Kurdish southeast region (Kurdistan), is a shared territory of information. Authority, in this context, is strongly linked to one’s epistemic access to and privileges about the knowledge of everyday affairs. With regard to information, two seemingly opposite yet interrelated social norms exist: A) actors should show adequate interest in matters that affect their neighbors, tribesmen, and relatives — they are responsible for knowing what is “in the common ground” (Enfield 2006). In what many consider in Kurdistan a textbook example of a police state, however, and amid rumors of residents turning into state collaborators, information becomes a dangerous possession. In this relation, B) actors are expected to carefully juggle their desire to know about others with the ethical imperative to push against the surveillance system put in place by the Turkish state. What they know, in other words, should stay inside the community, and breaches in this rule cause major fissures in social life, making an omnipresent topic of public debate. Based on ethnographic material detailing the anxious movement of information in Bahçesaray, from its primary locations to the underlying forms of moral reasoning, from the types of actors involved to their step by-step choices in verbal exchange, the following paper demonstrates that in Kurdistan, information is carved out by locals as a site of ethical practice precisely because of its inevitable excess and slippage in interaction. As such, epistemic authority is not merely an entitlement to knowledge, but a function of one’s studied orientation to communicative contexts in which information is carefully framed, transferred, evaluated, and at times disguised in accordance with socio-political structures and observable norms of interactional conduct.
6th PANEL

SAT
10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
CST

LAYERING KNOWLEDGES

DISCUSSANT: Ilana Gershon

Ruth N. Halls Professor,
Department of Anthropology,
Indiana University Bloomington
Tactile Numbers: The Authority and Embodiment of Measuring in Agricultural Sales

Sheng Long
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Multimodal Meme Making: Authority in Queer Spaces on TikTok

Anna Whitney
Undergraduate, Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago

The Trusted Messenger: Reaching the ‘hard to count’ in the 2020 Census

Hannah Norwood
PhD Candidate, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago

Layered Speech: Subtitling in Singapore

Kenzell Huggins
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology,
TACTILE NUMBERS:
The Authority and Embodiment of Measuring in Agricultural Sales

SHENG LONG
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

In the paper, I show how embodied techniques enter the fields of interactions and bring consequences in social relationships by dissecting ethnographic moments in agricultural business in rural Southeast China. I particularly focus on embodied habits or skills of using the body as a measuring tool. Once a corporeal tendency of perceiving certain things becomes embodied, this propensity contributes to specialized knowledge and proficiency in this field. I look at instants where people are aware of their embodied ability to quantify things and use it as a leverage in claiming authority. For pomelo orchard farmers, it is common for them to weigh things by sight and touch in everyday production. When it comes to the transactions of pomelos, this skill of perceiving the weight becomes necessary and sometimes advantageous during the negotiation between buyers and sellers. Buyers and sellers often bargain over the selection standards of pomelos at the scene of collecting products. As I show in the ethnographic case, a mastery of weighing things by hand is useful in competing for authority in this uneven relationship between purchasers and farmers.

MULTIMODAL MEME MAKING:
Authority in Queer Spaces on TikTok

ANNA WHITNEY
Undergraduate, Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago

TikTok is the up-and-coming, controversial social media platform of a new generation. Through the application’s unique features, now more than ever users are encouraged to pair together verbal and nonverbal imagery. This imagery takes 4 main channels: audio (including sounds which can be copied from other TikTok videos or outside sources), closed captions (which appear on the video), captions (which appear below the video), and the video itself. This analysis will particularly focus on LGBTQ+ discourse on TikTok, as it must be covert in order to exist on the app, let alone gain a following—queer TikTok creators constantly self-censor written content, and most rely on a hidden non-verbal semiotics that is only accessible through repetitive, continued interaction with TikToks that use the same semiotics. Complex, hidden semiotic systems are not unusual for groups that must evade the censorship of an authority (Polari is a similar example), but the multimodality of TikTok makes its systems particularly rich and interesting. In addition to explaining TikTok’s setup and algorithm, the research presented here will perform a close reading of several TikToks and explain the signs in use. The goal of this work is to weave together methods and literature from anthropology, media studies, linguistics, and gender and sexuality studies to break new, interdisciplinary ground.
THE TRUSTED MESSENGER:

Reaching the ‘Hard to Count’ in the 2020 Census

HANNAH NORWOOD

PhD Candidate, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the United States 2020 decennial Census was steeped in a sense of crisis in Chicago. Fear and misinformation due to the threatened inclusion of a citizenship question, decreased federal funding, and broad mistrust of government inspired worry about the effects of an undercount on federal funding and representation. In Chicago and across Illinois advocates, elected officials, organizers, and other professionals mobilized in working groups and “Complete Count Commissions” in an attempt to avert an undercount. This paper draws on a year of ethnographic fieldwork following these groups as they sought to reach and count those that the Census Bureau designates “hard to count.” I explore how, amidst a strategic campaign to dampen census participation amongst immigrants at the federal level, these groups attempted to increase counts through a reliance on “trusted messengers.” At the heart of this work was the question of how to speak to the “hard to count” in a way that could be heard. These efforts posit local interpersonal interaction as the site of trust—a strategy ultimately complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Bringing census digital media, advertising, and messaging toolkits into dialogue with virtual ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that scaling the state and speaking through the figure of the trusted messenger became the means to legitimacy for census counting. In so doing I explore how authority is remade in the form of the trusted messenger and made visible in moments when attempts to reach the “hard to count” seemingly fall flat.

LAYERED SPEECH:

Subtitling in Singapore

KENZELL HUGGINS

PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Singaporean film and television texts are often captioned in English with the intended goal to make Singaporean media texts of all languages accessible to audiences of different linguistic backgrounds. Yet, when it comes to captioning mostly English-language speech, the captions sometimes become a space for highlighting ideological stances expressed in the difference between the captions and the recorded speech. These differences most often emerge as diglossic contestations over the standardization of English, a highly contested sphere of Singaporean language politics. This paper examines the emergence of voices divided between channels in Singaporean media texts. These channels might be summed up as the audio track, image track, and captions (insofar as these are not embedded within the image track). The paper is also a methodological exploration of the potential of web scraping as a technique for the automatic collection of textual content in linguistic anthropology. Beyond only importing the statistical logics of “big data,” what are the possibilities and implications for linguistic anthropology?
7th PANEL

SAT
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM
CST

PRESENCING BOUNDARIES

DISCUSSANT: Barbra Meek

Professor,
Departments of Anthropology and Linguistics,
University of Michigan
Manufacturing (Official) Maya-ness in the Yucatan

Christopher Bloechl
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Signing for the Hearing Listening Subject

Aron Marie
PhD Candidate, Department of Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago

Processes of Differentiation in Shipibo-Konibo Communities Through Their Social Media Writing Practices

Jennifer Sierra
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan
MANUFACTURING (OFFICIAL) MAYA-NESS IN THE YUCATAN

CHRIS BLOECHL

PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago

On the Yucatan peninsula, (Yucatec) Maya language media production is closely intertwined with the state-mediated promotion of Maya and indigenous identities. This “identity work” might appear to be a fairly straightforward project, especially insofar as the identification of Maya people as tokens of an ‘indigenous’ type of national and global citizen accords with social-scientific classifications. But as this paper shows, Maya group-making in the Yucatan is hindered and complicated by incongruous local cultural conceptualizations of personhood and group. Some indexical meanings associated with máasewáal ‘Indian, indigenous’ and maaya ‘Maya’ impede the popular uptake of these identities as they are deployed in official discourses. My analysis shows how Maya media producers negotiate these challenges, in order to develop a notion of Maya-ness that is legible to the state and locatable within wider politics of indigenous identity. The articulation of an authoritative and pointedly Maya media “voice” depends crucially on acts of ostensibly neutral informing and entertaining that deploy certain categories in ways that contradict the norms of vernacular Maya speakers. Radio, I argue, affords Maya promoters with an especially productive technology for motivating ethnic groupness. In routine broadcast talk, they invoke and folklorize long-held notions of Maya-ness and indigeneity, while at the same time they aim to modify these grounds for groupness.

SIGNING FOR THE HEARING LISTENING SUBJECT

ARON MARIE

PhD Candidate, Department of Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago

Over the past two decades, deaf activists in HÀ NỘI, VIỆT NAM have been engaged in advocating for a variety of political changes, from educating deaf children in sign language, to helping deaf adults access better employment. Yet beyond the specific issues there is a larger, perhaps more urgent project; creating an authoritative representative deaf voice, that is recognized by the state and hearing society at large. The HÀ NỘI Association of the Deaf (HAD), the largest and longest running deaf organization in the country, defines itself as “an independent, representative voice for the deaf community in Hanoi and Vietnam” (HAD Facebook profile). Yet while HAD aspires to be an independent representative voice, it has repeatedly been denied status as an independent community-based organization by the Vietnamese state. Much of the problem in achieving this status is that hearing authorities do not recognize deaf signers’ speech genres as indexing competence and authority. In this context, much of the labor of deaf leaders is directed towards determining the register shibboleths of hearing political genres, and attempting to transduce these norms into sign language. In this talk, I examine the work deaf activists put into creating signed political genres. Drawing on Miyako Inoue’s concept of the listening subject I ask; What does it mean to sign for a hearing listening subject? What semiotic labor and acts of mimesis go into making sign recognizable to hearing people as authoritative, while simultaneously representative of a group defined by linguistic difference?

PROCESSES OF DIFFERENTIATION IN SHIPIBO-KONIBO COMMUNITIES THROUGH THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA WRITING PRACTICES

JENNIFER SIERRA

PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Participation in digital technologies have pressured Shipibos-Konibos, an indigenous society in the Peruvian Amazons, to develop a habitual practice of textuality in Shipibo. Shipibo, the indigenous language for Shipibo-Konibos, has been traditionally a spoken language (DeMori, 2013). For Shipibo, spoken language acquires power in an everyday agentive sense (a la Speech Act Theory) as well as in the realm of ritual through the act of singing (ikaros). However, the need for adopting a standardized writing system for the Shipibo language was recently intensified by the active participation of Shipibos in social media and the urgency for communicating in the Shipibo language on these sites (Best, 2019). While Shipibos are currently working on developing a Shipibo dictionary to act as the authoritative object to guide their spellings and writing practices, in the meantime Shipibos actively criticize each other for their “idiosyncratic” Shipibo spellings on their WhatsApp and Facebook communications. This creates a process of differentiation among Shipibos, where those perceived to display the “wrong” spellings become associated with meanings of “non-indigenous” or “less indigenous” status (mestizo). In this paper, I will explore how Shipibos talk about their online spelling practices and how online spelling practices become a source of authority to judge Shipibos indigenous status. This paper will draw from the work of language ideologies (Irvine & Gal, 2019) to make sense about how spelling practices become crucial for the way indigenous people interpret themselves and others in their communities in the context of social media communication in which both writing and the social media platform constitute a new technology.
THANK YOU TO OUR MICHICAGOAN & SEMIOTICS WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS:

Alice Yeh  
PhD Candidate,  
Department of Anthropology,  
University of Chicago

Rob Gelles  
PhD Student,  
Department of Anthropology,  
University of Chicago