

Language in Society 41 (2012)
doi:10.1017/S004740451200070X

PAUL KOCKELMAN, *Language, culture, and mind: Natural constructions and social kinds*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. ix, 246. Hb. \$106.

Reviewed by N. J. ENFIELD
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics
PB 310, 6500 AH
Nijmegen, Netherlands
Nick.Enfield@mpi.nl

In *Language, culture, and mind: Natural constructions and social kinds*, anthropologist Paul Kockelman delivers a master class in modern linguistic anthropology. As he explains in his overview of the book, Kockelman employs five “core techniques.” First, the chosen conceptual domains are described on all their levels—morphosyntactic, semantic, pragmatic, discourse distribution, and frequency—while doing “justice to the particulars.” Second, the focus of interest is studied not only through the referential and expressive functions of language, but in terms of other functions as well (poetic, etc.). Third, context and the iconic/indexical nature of language are assumed to be no less important than the symbolic aspects of language. Fourth, there is a focus on how speakers interpret one set of structures in terms of another, both demonstrating and exploiting the reflexivity and system-internal structure of language. Fifth, says Kockelman, “each chapter pairs a grammatical category with a psychological theme,” including emotions and personhood. These five core techniques, or at least the first four, should be recognizable to any linguistic anthropologist as sine quibus non of the business of this field. But seldom do we see this gold standard being genuinely met. Kockelman not only specifies what it would take to nail an analysis of the relations between language, culture, and mind, he actually does it. He delivers on all five promises.

In five substantive chapters, presented between pithy introductory and concluding bookends, Kockelman “examines mind through the lens of language and culture” (2). The chosen means to this end is a solidly constructed account of a set of complementary aspects of the semiotic—mostly linguistic—practices of Q’eqchi’ speakers in a Mayan village of remote highland Guatemala. Kockelman does not fear the complexities of semantic systems and grammatical typologies, nor does he shy away from the rich details of ethnographic context. Nor, especially, is he afraid to confront cognition. It is common to find the words *language*, *culture*, and *mind* strung together as in the unfortunately bland title of this book, but it is rare to find all three of these pillars shored up to the same very firm degree.

In Ch. 2, Kockelman discusses inalienable possession in Q’eqchi’, working systematically through the grammatical, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive levels of this domain. He shows that there is a “particularly strong resonance”

(32) between local ontology of the person as manifest in a range of measures related to inalienable possession: cognition, cultural practice, patterns of frequency of reference in discourse, semantics, and patterns of grammatical marking. He shows that the category of inalienable possessions, measured in these multiple ways, can deliver a cartography of personhood, including the fused personhood of couples, with their maximally overlapping sets of possessions. Importantly, Kockelman does not claim that one or another of these measures is primary (34). They presumably all provide important data to the child in socialization who is striving to acquire a synchronic idiolect of a complex sociocultural system, and thereby to attain membership in that system. Kockelman points out, however, that from certain temporal-causal perspectives, including diachrony and enchrony, asymmetries in the form of dependencies among the various measures become visible. He hypothesizes that the semantic and grammatical patterns are “ultimately the result of” the discourse patterns, and that the discourse patterns in turn result from “both relatively widespread cognitive processes and relatively localized cultural practices” (34). The result is a rare, causally plausible account of ethnosyntax that is not vulnerable to the fatal flaws often found in grammar-culture work (see Enfield 2002a:18 for discussion of a “linkage problem” in claims of relations between grammar and culture; cf. Simpson 2002; Evans 2003).

Ch. 3 focuses on complement-taking predicates in Q’eqchi’. Again we are treated to a systematic account of the semantic and grammatical details of the Q’eqchi’ system for joining predicates together in complex structures. Kockelman examines the full set of complement-taking predicates, working through the familiar categories of temporal-aspectual predicates (“begin to,” etc.), predicates of cognition (“think that,” etc.), and of speaking (“say that,” etc.), then digging into the relative tightness of the different semantic classes of complement-taking predicates, as defined by their morphological behavior and things like operator scope and other distinguishing measures of interclausal relations. After this general discussion, firmly grounded in the context of syntactic typology, Kockelman goes deeper into one class of complement-taking predicates that was introduced in Ch. 2, namely the “possessed-heart constructions.” These structures, found in languages around the world (Enfield & Wierzbicka 2002), use a reference of some kind to the heart or other bodily seat of the emotions to predicate emotional experiences; for instance, in one of the Q’eqchi’ examples, “to have a leveled heart” means “to be content.” I have elsewhere described my reservations about the relation between synchrony and diachrony here (Enfield 2002b), namely, Can we be sure that speakers of this language have a ‘live’ understanding of the ‘heart’ metaphor?

Ch. 4 looks at how the linguistic expression of time is organized and tracked in Q’eqchi’, with reference to an exhaustive study of a historical text “The marriage between the sun and the moon.” (The full text is supplied as an appendix.) The aim is to use temporality’s expression as a key for getting into

intersubjectivity. This is done with reference to an ingenious system of description of temporal-aspectual relations, drawing on the early semantics of Reichenbach (1947), extended later by Bull (1960) and Klein (1994), and expressing these in terms of Jakobson's taxonomy of "events" (90–92), then using these to explicate a rich set of temporal expressions in Q'eqchi'. With characteristic exhaustiveness, Kockelman traces interconnections between the key themes of temporality, intentionality, ontology, and causality, using temporal relations and their grammatical realization as a window onto the cognitive ethnography of "theory of mind." He concludes that "while it is tempting to reify theories of mind, or even ethnopsychologies, as relatively isolated and self-contained domains, we see here that theories of mind are impossible to separate from religious beliefs, taxonomic reasoning, social hierarchies, and 'culture' more generally" (88).

Ch. 5 focuses on a set of bound grammatical markers that form a system for specifying modality and status, in the grammatical senses of these terms, using this as an access point to examine stance. Kockelman works systematically through the morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the modal clitics, with rich exemplification of each one: an afactive status marker, an optative status marker, a factive status marker, and a counterfactive status marker. Much of the analysis is done in Jakobsonian terms, relating speech event (Es) to narrated event (En) in various ways, enriched by the inclusion of Ec ("commitment event") and Ers ("reported speech event") in addition. He concludes the chapter with a defining statement on the nature of stance, though given its highly presupposing nature it may have stanceologists doing creative exegesis for years to come.

Ch. 6 moves to the other end of the grammatical core, to look at interjections. As a form class, interjections are at the opposite end of the scale from the modal clitics, being entirely nonembedded syntactically. Interjections form utterances of their own. Their distributional context is not so much grammatical as enchronic, occurring as moves all of their own, engendered by, and engendering, other moves. With extended examples, as is necessary for these highly context-grounded things, Kockelman examines the cognitive content of interjections by studying their relations to the metalinguistic usages of complement-taking predicates in the cognitive domain such as "desire," "fear," and "know." What follows is a rich exposition of the meanings of interjections, both generally and with specific reference to a Q'eqchi' set of forms. There is detailed and extensive discussion of their usage in context, and their relative frequencies of use. Kockelman gives special attention to the value of exploiting language's reflexive potential, here by studying the relation between two distinct semantico-grammatical systems, one used by natives as a device for explicating the other. As he summarizes it, "by moving between typology and description (general and particular), and between signification and interpretation (language and metalanguage), the identities and differences between the levels of

description and the domains described were evinced” (201). Here is where we see the story coming back around to the simple but powerful neo-Piercean semiotic framework that underlies the entire project (see the opening and closing chapters), a framework that insists not merely on studying relations, but relations between relations (cf. Kockelman 2011): “If human beings are indeed those entities whose agency is both enabled and constrained by the fact that their practices and their representations of practices are never commensurate, then the relevant locus for cross-cultural comparison should not be a set of practices, nor a set of representations (of practices), but rather such relationships between the two” (201).

What I especially wish to applaud is Kockelman’s demonstration in this book that cognition is no more mysterious or unobservable than social status. He states on p. 7 that “mental states are no more ‘private’ than social statuses,” meaning that we use fundamentally the same semiotic logic to conclude that a person “is afraid” as we do to conclude that somebody “is a waiter.” It concerns the signs that this person gives and gives off. Here Kockelman strikes to the heart of a current, sometimes heated issue, in research on language use. Some authors worry that we should not speculate about cognition because cognition is not accessible. Here is Kockelman’s retort in the conclusion: “a domain that at first seems to be the most private and invisible (mind) was rendered both empirically tractable and widely comparable by reference to the cultural processes and linguistic practices that mediate it. Stances, then, provide a public face for, and a social perspective on, the inferential and indexical processes that constitute the essence of intentionality, one of the defining characteristics of mind” (208).

REFERENCES

- Bull, William E. (1960). *Time, tense, and the verb*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Enfield, N. J. (2002a). Ethnosyntax: Introduction. In N. J. Enfield (ed.), *Ethnosyntax: Explorations in culture and grammar*, 1–30. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2002b). Semantic analysis of body parts in emotion terminology: Avoiding the exoticisms of ‘obstinate monosemy’ and ‘online extension’. *Pragmatics and Cognition* 10(1–2):85–106.
- , & Anna Wierzbicka (2002). Introduction: The body in description of emotion. *Pragmatics and Cognition* 10(1–2):1–24.
- Evans, Nicholas D. (2003). Context, culture, and structuration in the languages of Australia. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32:13–40.
- Klein, Wolfgang (1994). *Time in language*. London: Routledge.
- Kockelman, Paul (2011). Biosemiosis, technocognition, and sociogenesis: Selection and significance in a multiverse of sieving and serendipity. *Current Anthropology* 52(5):711–39.
- Reichenbach, Hans (1947). *Elements of symbolic logic*. New York: The Free Press.
- Simpson, Jane (2002). From common ground to syntactic construction: Associated path in Warlpiri. In N. J. Enfield (ed.), *Ethnosyntax: Explorations in grammar and culture*, 287–308. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(Received 8 March 2012)