

The Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas

*** SSILA BULLETIN ***

An Information Service for SSILA Members

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233.0 SSILA Business

* Results of the 2005 SSILA elections

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Ninety-seven ballots were received by the announced deadline. Elected were:

Leslie Saxon, Vice President for 2006 and President-elect for 2007
Patricia A. Shaw, Member-at-Large of the Executive Committee, 2006-08

Victor Golla, Secretary-Treasurer, 2006
Alejandra Vidal, Member of the Nominating Committee, 2006-08.

* Seifart wins Haas Book Award

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Frank Seifart, of Berlin, Germany, was presented with the 2005 Mary R. Haas Book Award at the January meeting in Albuquerque for his dissertation, "The Structure and Use of Shape-Based Noun Classes in Miraña (North West Amazon)". The selection committee described it as "a most thorough and impressive description of an important typological phenomenon in a little studied language, which is sure to be of interest both to specialists in Amazonian languages and to typologists and other general linguists. It will certainly help to advance the study of noun class and classifier systems worldwide." The committee also commended Seifart for the extensive (and doubtless occasionally difficult) field work, both conventional and experimental, on which the work was based.

Seifart was able to make last-minute arrangements to attend the Albuquerque meeting, where he received the Haas Award in person at the SSILA Business Meeting from the chair of the selection committee. Pamela Munro. The other members of the committee were Andrew Garrett, Sergio Meira, Douglas Parks, and David Rood.)

* Lakota Consortium awarded Ken Hale Prize

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SSILA's Ken Hale Prize, which honors those who strive to link the academic and community spheres in the spirit of Ken Hale, was awarded this year to the non-profit Lakota Language Consortium (LLC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to rescuing the Lakota Sioux language. The prize and cash award were presented in recognition of the organization's outstanding community language work and deep commitment to the documentation, maintenance, promotion, and revitalization of the Lakota language, one of the country's largest remaining Native American languages.

Pam Bunte, chair of the 2005 Ken Hale Prize selection committee, described the factors that led to the decision. "We were really impressed. The Lakota Language Consortium has done a great job with their documentation. Their materials have made it easier for community members to teach the language. They work closely with many people throughout the community and the praise of their efforts was truly amazing." The committee also included Nora England, Michael Krauss, and Roberto Zavala Maldonado.

Wilhelm K. Meya, Executive Director of the organization, received the prize on behalf of the Board of Directors. The Lakota Language Consortium is made up of numerous committed community members and linguists (see the LLC website, <http://www.lakhota.org>). As one of the largest language revitalization organizations in the country, its materials are used by over twenty-two school systems and expose over 4000 children to the Lakota language. In addition to Meya, the LLC's Board of Directors includes Jan Ulrich, who leads the organization's materials development work, and Leonard Little Finger, who directs the Lakota Language Studies program at Loneman School in Oglala, South Dakota.

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* The copyright issue
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>From Bill Poser (billposer@alum.mit.edu) 11 Jan 2006:

During the SSILA Business Meeting in Albuquerque, Pam Munro alluded to a growing problem that scholars are having with copyright restrictions. This problem results from recent changes in US copyright law, which I briefly commented on at the meeting. Let me expand. The Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998 (www.copyright.gov/legislation/pl105-298.pdf) extended copyright protection to the life of the author plus 70 years, or in the case of corporate authorship, 95 years. In addition, it eliminated the requirement that the copyright holder register an extension in order to exploit the full period of copyright protection. The result is that works are protected for a ridiculously long time whether or not the holder has any desire to do so, and since no renewal is necessary it may be impossible to find out who owns the copyright.

Several changes would improve this situation:

- (a) Shorten the period of copyright protection. A return to earlier copyright law would be reasonable. That law provided for a period of 28 years plus an extension of 28 years. This is more than enough time for the author to obtain reasonable compensation for his or her work.
- (b) Cause copyright to lapse if the holder does not register for an extension. This would have the effect of eliminating copyright after the initial period (e.g. 28 years) in the numerous cases in which there is no real value to the author. It would also force the copyright holder to make contact and provide information as to how he or she may be contacted.
- (c) Require the copyright office to maintain a database of contact information for copyright holders.
- (d) Impose compulsory licensing where the copyright holder cannot readily be located. A precedent is article 67 of the Japanese copyright law. This way, if the copyright holder cannot be located, the work is still available to others.

The recent changes in copyright law have been for the benefit of the entertainment industry. (The 1998 law is known to critics as the "Mickey Mouse Protection Act," since Disney was one of its major proponents). They are of no benefit to the consumer or to most authors and performers, but they are an impediment to scholarly work. A good deal of attention has recently been given to this problem of "orphan works." Indeed, the Copyright Office recently solicited comments on the problem.

A good source of additional information is Public Knowledge (www.publicknowledge.org/issues/ow). This is an issue on which SSILA might want to take a position as an organization.

--Bill Poser
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233.2 Breaking News

* Archeologists uncover earliest known Mayan writing

>From Bjorn Carey (at the MSNBC website) 5 Jan 2005:

Newly discovered hieroglyphs show that the Maya were writing at a complex level 150 years earlier than previously thought. The glyphs, which date to about 250 B.C., were found on preserved painted walls and plaster fragments in the pyramidal structure known as Las Pinturas, in San Bartolo, Guatemala.

The earliest known evidence of writing the New World dates to about 400 to 300 B.C. and is associated with the Zapotecs in the Oaxaca Valley south of central Mexico. Most of the early Maya writing comes from between A.D. 150 and 250, and because Zapotec writing emerged so much earlier, researchers have long believed that the Maya were influenced by it.

The earliest single Mayan glyph - which could have stood for a person's name or might have been a sign on a calendar - dates to about 600 B.C. But it isn't considered writing. These new glyphs are much more complex, project leader William Saturno of the University of New Hampshire said.

"This is a full-blown and fully developed script," Saturno told LiveScience. "Which is not to say that the Maya invented writing and not the Zapotec, but it does lead us to question the origins and the complexities of these origins."

One thing seems certain: The Mayan style was not influenced by the Zapotecs. "It's not similar at all to Zapotec," Saturno said. "You have these roughly contemporary examples that are completely different, which implies a more complex history than simple derivation."

Despite being clearly developed written text, the new-found work cannot yet be read by scientists. "It's definitely writing, though, no question about that," Saturno said. "Some of these signs are consistent with Maya writing for the next 1,000 years."

For example, glyph 7 is an early version of "AJAW," a symbol ubiquitously used with kings' names that means "lord, noble or ruler." Glyph 2 has vague pictorial qualities and may suggest a hand holding a brush or a sharp knifelike object.

A common problem with dating Mayan writing is that it is often on stone, which scientists can't accurately date using radiocarbon dating. Instead, they must use stylistic changes to date materials. However, Saturno and his team found these writings in a pyramid made in part with wood, which is carbon-based and can be dated with radiocarbon techniques.

* Margaret Langdon, 79, professor emeritus of linguistics at the University of California, San Diego, died on October 25, 2005, in Bishop, California, where she had recently moved to be near her daughter. She was the primary expert on the linguistics of Diegueño and a leading figure in Hokan studies. A founding member of SSILA, she served as our Society's fourth President in 1985.

* Paul Proulx, 63, an independent scholar well known for his work on Algonquian, Ritwan, and Quechua, as well as the study of kinship terminology and its implications for the reconstruction of social organization, died at his home in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, on December 5, 2005. He had been suffering from cancer.

* Gladys Tantaquidgeon, 106, the Mohegan tribe's venerable medicine woman and custodian of its history and traditions, died on November 1, 2005, at the Uncasville, Connecticut, home where she had lived all her life. Tantaquidgeon wrote several books on native medicine practices and folk lore. Her best-known work, "A Study of Delaware Indian Medicine Practices and Folk Beliefs," was published in 1942 and has been twice reprinted.

[Full obituaries appear in the January issue of the SSILA Newsletter.]

233.6 E-Mail Address Updates

The following additions or changes have been made to the SSILA e-mail list since the last Bulletin:

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When your e-mail address changes, please notify us (golla@ssila.org).

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The SSILA Bulletin is distributed electronically to all members of SSILA. Non-members may subscribe free of charge by sending their e-mail address to the editor (golla@ssila.org).

SSILA also publishes a quarterly hard-copy Newsletter that contains book reviews, notices of journal articles and recent dissertations, and other news and commentary. The Newsletter and other publications of the Society are distributed only to members or to institutional subscribers.

SSILA welcomes applications for membership from anyone interested in the scholarly study of the languages of the native peoples of North, Central, and South America. Dues for 2006 are \$16 (US) or \$20 (Canadian) and may be paid in advance for 2007 and 2008 at the 2006 rate. Checks or money orders should be made payable to "SSILA" and sent to: SSILA, P.O. Box 555, Arcata, CA 95518. For further information, visit the SSILA website (<http://www.ssila.org>).
