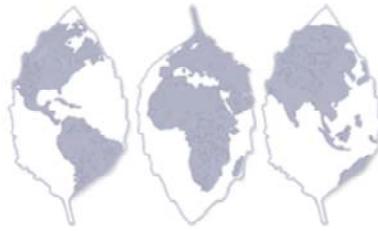


The Torture of Linguistic Choice: Emotion and Instantaneous Pragmatics in Language



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It is axiomatic in the study of linguistic pragmatics that speakers must make instantaneous choices from a myriad of variants in phonology, morphology and syntax "on the fly" during the course of interaction. However, the specific psychological and neurophysiological mechanisms that both prompt these choices have largely been taken for granted. Theoretical approaches to this problem in the past have focused on linguistic mechanisms such as Michael Silverstein's notion of "metapragmatics" or cultural approaches such as the analysis of "habitus," as outlined by Pierre Bourdieu. While acknowledging the importance of these approaches, in this paper I extend this view by suggesting that these instantaneous choices are largely governed by the same cognitive mechanisms that govern emotional response. Drawing on the work of contemporary neurophysiology, pragmatic philosophy and phenomenology, I draw on examples from Japanese, Persian and Javanese.

William O. Beeman is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, where he was Department Chair from 2007-2013, a position he will resume in 2014. Best known as a Middle East Specialist for more than 30 years, he has also worked in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Japan, China and South Asia. Recognized for special expertise in Iranian culture and linguistics, he is the author or editor of more than 100 scholarly articles, 500 opinion pieces and 14 books, including Language, Status and Power in Iran, and The "Great Satan" vs. the "Mad Mullahs": How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other. He has been a consultant to the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the United Nations and the European Union on Middle Eastern affairs. He has also written extensively on music and performance traditions both in Western and non-Western traditions. His latest book on this topic is Iranian Performance Traditions. His co-authored book with Daniel Helfgot, The Third Line: The Singer as Interpreter has been widely used in teaching and research. His forthcoming book: The Meistersingers: Opera Performance in Germany centers on his experience as an opera performer in a leading German opera house. During 2013-2014 he is Visiting Scholar at Stanford University.

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