

Abstracts

“A Place Insufficiently Imagined”: Language, Belief, and the Pakistan Crisis of 1971

PHILIP OLDENBURG Pages 711–733

The breakup of Pakistan in 1971 can be explained in part by a failure of understanding on the part of the West Pakistani leadership of Pakistan, a seeming inability to recognize what the meaning of Pakistan was for Bengalis, and thus the cause of the demand for Bengali as a state language equal to Urdu. Exploration of the language issue in the period before and after independence helps to illuminate the divergence of belief about the form of the new state and the meaning of parity in representation between east and west wings of the country. The final tragedy of the attempted crushing of the movement for an autonomous Bangladesh is also in part an outcome of this pattern of belief, in particular the belief about the role of Hindus in the expression of Bengali identity.

Interpretive Approaches to Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures—A Symposium

Introduction

SUSAN RODGERS AND RICHARD MCGINN Pages 735–742

The introduction to the symposium sets out a methodological framework for the apprehension of Southeast Asian rituals, languages, and literary texts so that they are at once open to cross-cultural comparative analysis and recorded in social and symbolic contextual detail. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur's use of the term “interpretation” is central here: he urges students of cultures to combine attention to structural features of language and culture (for example, grammatical patterns) with inquiries into social contextual features (for example, speech usage in real communities). Moving back and forth between the two sorts of analysis allows researchers to bring the insights of the one pole to the investigation of the other; the full hermeneutic process constitutes interpretation. This style of inquiry, a modification of the sort of interpretive social science developed by Geertz and Becker, allows Southeast Asianists to draw on careful ethnography to make crucial “course corrections” in anthropological and linguistic theory building in general.

A Principle of Text Coherence in Indonesian Languages

RICHARD MCGINN Pages 743–753

The logic of Indonesian subjectless and tenseless expressions appears to have cultural implications, just as the use of tenses in English scientific writing entails much more than grammatical minutiae. A. L. Becker has pointed out that *tense* in English functions in a “coherence system” that pervades and transcends grammar.

A parallel coherence system is suggested for Indonesian, based not on tense but on *topic*. Paul Ricoeur's distinction between LANGUAGE and DISCOURSE is the basis of the claim that Indonesian sentences cohere on the bond between grammatical subject and discourse topic. Examples are drawn from a number of contexts that call forth passive sentences in Indonesian. The article concludes on another suggestion by Becker. The Indonesian topic may be part of a larger deictic category of *person*, which may be related in discourse to orientation in space—both physical and social—of participants in the speech event. If this suggestion is correct, then the contrast between English and Indonesian coherence systems may be found in the opposition tense/time vs. person/space.

A Coincidence of Metaphors: Notes on Two Modes of Text Building in the Indonesian Novel "Surabaya"

JEFF DREYFUSS

Pages 755–763

This article suggests that two distinct modes of text-building constraints coincide in the Indonesian novel "Surabaya." The first set of constraints consists of narrative functions that shape sentence-level grammar within the story; the second level of text-building constraints shapes the thematic structure of the story. The author argues that, unlike its narrative structure, which is bound by the linearity of time, the thematic structure, of "Surabaya" is defined by a hierarchy of "heavier" and "lighter" themes, the "heavier" themes being evoked more often than are the "lighter" themes. He suggests that heaviness of theme is a strategy of text building found in classical Malaysian (Hikayat) texts, gamelan orchestra musical organization, and in calendric reckoning in much of Indonesia. He argues, in sum, for a method of writing that encourages grammatical description from two or more perspectives. "Binocular vision," to use Gregory Bateson's words, is necessary in writing to provide a more honest, richer description of a text than a single mode of grammatical description can provide; it makes available to readers more than one means of access to the text.

Symbolic Patterning in Angkola Batak Adat Ritual

SUSAN RODGERS

Pages 765–778

In Sumatra's Angkola Batak culture, rituals celebrating major kinship-related events such as marriage have many layers of social and symbolic meaning; they have political, kinship, musical, mythic, and philosophical dimensions as lengthy, oratory-filled ceremonies that unite wife-giving lineages with wife-receivers. This article examines several ways that the interpretive approach that is discussed in the introduction can help students of Indonesian ritual grasp diverse aspects of Batak marriage rituals such as their hidden symbolic organization and their practical political implications. The article deals with a short sequence of *adat* dance staged for anthropological research purposes. (*Adat*, once translated as customary law, roughly means Angkola ceremonial life, kinship norms, and political thought; *adat* is eminently flexible, redefined by each Batak generation.) The choreography of the dance (wife-receivers dancing with wife-givers), songs, clothing, the political biog-

raphies of the participants, and the fact that the event was staged render the ceremony open to both structural and social contextual inquiry.

Interpretive Approaches: A Psycholinguistic Perspective

DANE L. HARWOOD

Pages 779–784

An interpretive approach to studying human activity is a potentially powerful set of procedures for the social sciences. The proponents of this methodology focus on levels of “discourse constraints” that give meaning to public behavior in their attempt to link the “explanation” of texts to an “understanding” of context. The argument can be extended to the search by cognitive scientists and psycholinguists for constraints on the “discourse of thought,” including the interrelationship of thought and the context within which thinking takes place.

The “texts” of human behavior, linguistic or otherwise, seem to cohere. Discovering how the principles of coherence are acquired by individuals as they develop, and how this “tacit knowledge” informs “public action,” will require joint effort by many social scientists, including psychologists. A rigorous interpretive approach also requires that we acknowledge how, as researchers, we add layers of meaning to the activities we observe.

Rural Collectivization and Decollectivization in China—A Review Article

NORMA DIAMOND

Pages 785–792

Since 1979, China has changed its rural policies from emphasis on the collective economy to the support of a variety of household and individual contract systems. The forms of economic organization introduced between 1954 and the late 1970s have been criticized in the Chinese media and blamed for slow rates of development. However, in retrospect, it is not completely clear that the form itself was to blame. Three of the four books under review are in part defenses of the past and critiques of present-day policies. Basing their work on interviews with peasants and rural cadres, these authors present both the achievements and the failures stemming from state policies during the collective years, and some of the peasant reactions to them. They also raise questions about the long-term implications of the new system. The fourth author is uniformly critical of the collective decades and the present readjustments. The extent to which rural socialism was a failure and the advantages or disadvantages of the household economy are matters that scholars of China and economic development will continue to argue in coming decades.