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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Cooperating with Written Texts: The Pragmatics and Comprehension of Written Texts by Dieter Stein

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LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Cooperating with Written Texts: The Pragmatics and Comprehension of Written Texts.

Dieter Stein, ed. *Studies in Anthropological Linguistics*, 5. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992. 712 pp.

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This is an extremely miscellaneous collection of 32 papers about written texts, largely from linguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives, originating in a West German conference in 1989 with the same title as the volume. Accordingly, it appears that most of the contributors are linguists, with the majority from Germany, although this is difficult to determine because no biographies, academic affiliations, addresses, or specialties are provided for the authors. The placement of this volume in the *Studies in Anthropological Linguistics* series seems fortuitous, as only a very few contributions recognize the placement of texts within cultural contexts or the influence of those texts on the ambient culture. Most of the studies are directed entirely to the text as bounded by the representations on the page or in relation to a culturally undefined psychology of the reader. Despite the title of the volume and conference, "Cooperating with Written Texts," few of the contributions give more than passing mention to the problems of texts creating cooperation among people or of an individual adjusting perception to align him- or herself more cooperatively with the text. The subtitle, "The Pragmatics and Comprehension of Written Texts," does more adequately reflect the themes of a larger part of the articles.

The collection is organized in six parts. The first part is entirely psycholinguistic in a generally universalistic mode: "Writing, Literacy, and Comprehension." The second part, "Developmental Aspects: The Evolution of Written Texts," offers two chapters potentially of anthropological interest: one a study of how language comprehension changes with the emergence and learning of a written form of a traditionally oral language among the Mohawk; another that reminds us of the various cultural factors within which the pragmatics of medieval European texts need to be assessed. Unfortunately, the latter never gets beyond general considerations to the specific assessment of particular kinds of texts. Another chapter of the analysis of scientific texts

is really on a study in text-focused deixis, paying little attention to the substantial work done in science studies and rhetoric on the cultural dynamics of scientific texts.

Part 3, "Literary Texts: Inferring Meaning(s)," is text-bound in its analyses. Part 5, "At the Interface of Linguistics and Pragmatics: Individual Linguistic Structures," and part 6, "Computational Modeling of Text Comprehension," are focused entirely on linguistic structure.

Part 4, "Pragmatics and Individual Text Types," does offer a few more articles that consider how texts serve varying functions in culture, can be used variously according to cultural imperatives, and are shaped in form and content by cultural ends. This section includes chapters on the moral hortatory function of Puritan wills, the duplicitous relation of legal notices to various ostensible audiences and supervisory regulators, the way values enter into the interpretation of texts, and how text understanding seems to occur at the intersection of personal, social, and cultural factors.

Perhaps the miscellany of the volume indicates how much at a loss traditional linguistics is when it attempts to return to the study of written texts, which it abandoned earlier in the century in favor of oral language. In any event, although some of the articles are interesting in isolation, there seems little focused relation among them to suggest that any leading-edge synergy went on at the conference or would emerge from a reading of this volume or its parts.

Language in Its Cultural Embedding: Explorations in the Relativity of Signs and Sign Systems. *Harald Haarmann*. *Studies in Anthropological Linguistics*, 4. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990. 292 pp.

GREG URBAN

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On one page we espy a sacrificial tablet from the tomb of Iunu, a high-ranking official under pharaoh Cheops. On another we are surprised by a diagram of modern dental laboratory equipment, complete with numbered arrows keyed to descriptors such as "melt push-button" and "coil lifting lever handle." What do these have in common? Both are examples of pictures (iconically coded