A Sandrizona Retrospective: From the Desert to the Ocean and Back Again

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Anthropology is a practice of learning from context, of being a student of circumstance with an eye for meaningful patterns. Linguistic anthropologists often point to how language is central to such meaning making and therefore to the anthropological enterprise—the subfield's minoritarian status notwithstanding.[1] The challenges involved in learning the craft of linguistic anthropology continue to expand as different schools of thought intertwine, from a well recognized grounding in semiotics to variationist and sociocultural linguistics, conversation and discourse analysis, ethnomethodology, gesture and kinesics, visual analysis, and dynamic traditions in language documentation and revitalization. These frameworks provide tools for contextualizing language use and elucidating the powerful social and political work it does in people's everyday lives. As graduate students at the University of Arizona (Stinnett and Taha) and the University of California, San Diego (Peacock), we wanted to create a forum that would allow us to openly explore this complexity and hone skills related to fieldwork, data collection and analysis, and public presentation of results. Beginning in the spring semester of 2009, we established an event to do just that. Under the portmanteau of "Sandrizona," this workshop-conference continued through ten iterations over the course of eight years, as it alternated

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1 Among the 66 graduate programs in anthropology across the U.S., 29 currently offer graduate training in linguistic anthropology (American Anthropological Association, AnthroGuide 2016).

between the UCSD and UA campuses and drew students from a variety of language-focused disciplines. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on the founding, organization, and history of Sandrizona as a student-centered initiative. Its development over the years also offers a window onto the changing contours and priorities of linguistic anthropology itself.

Genesis: How Sandrizona Got Started

The three of us first met as graduate students in 2008 at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Annual Meeting in San Francisco, and in the course of an informal conversation realized we shared an interest in creating an alternative but complementary venue where students from our respective campuses could share work at various stages of progress. Since our universities were relatively close to one another geographically, and our departments had complementary strengths in terms of faculty expertise and training methods, we decided that a collaborative conference would be ideal. Furthermore, as linguistic anthropologists, we considered that a workshop format would provide opportunities to examine data excerpts and engage in sustained discussion about relevant theory, methods, and analytic frameworks. Finally, we wanted to leverage our collective power: place student work at the center but showcase faculty contributions and recruit our departmental mentors into building cross-institutional and cross-generational connections to enhance our training.

We envisioned this event as an entirely graduate student run effort. We would set the agenda, raise funds, and do the organizing. Additionally, we intended the format of the event to be flexible, conducive to discussion, above all, and shifting with the changing needs of the student participants while responding to developments in the field of linguistic anthropology. What we ended up creating was a collaborative conference that gave graduate students an opportunity to present their material—at whatever stage it was in, from project proposals to post-field work reflections, from completed class-

room projects to preliminary data analyses—to a diverse group of peers and scholars.

To these ends, Sandrizona meetings generally lasted one-and-a-half days, featuring a series of 30- to 40-minute single-session presentations, and 15-20 minutes of discussion following each paper. In this way, we ensured constructive feedback for each participant. We arranged the flow of presentations by alternating presenters from each institution, instead of grouping papers thematically. A single keynote speaker was invited each year from among the faculty at the non-host university and often spent the bulk of the conference weekend attending student presentations and offering feedback. Host university faculty made a point of attending, as well, and all those interested were invited to share meals together during the conference. This format gave way to ongoing conversations as participants crowded in together among computers and tables in UCSD's linguistic anthropology lab or gathered around trays piled high with a tamale lunch at the UA.

At the onset, the UA students brought to Sandrizona the focused training and methodology from their program's linguistic anthropology track, guided by Jane Hill, Susan Philips, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Jennifer Roth-Gordon and, later, Qing Zhang. UCSD students, on the other hand, were part of their department's cultural anthropology track and did not have a dedicated linguistic anthropology program. With the support of Kathryn Woolard and John Haviland, UCSD's core Sandrizona participants included a group of students who were highly interested in language, with varying degrees of training.

Keynote speakers (see list in Appendix) addressed a range of methodological, geographic and thematic interests, from the semiotics of race in travel writing on West Papua to social justice through linguistic activism in the United States. Student presentations, in turn, spanned the globe from Tonga to Mexico, Norway to Ecuador, Jordan and the Philippines. Those from UCSD tended to favor sociolinguistic concerns that linked language to wider notions of nationhood, national memory, and global concerns, including how memories of

North Ireland conflicts are located in physical landscapes; how the linguistic practices of families in rural Mexico reveal competing values of Spanish and the local language being taught to the next generation; and how Ukrainian youth's clothing choices reflect class-based identities that engage with notions of the West. UA students' work highlighted semiotic and discourse analytic approaches to the construction of power, identity, and inequality through face-to-face interactions, including research on disability talk among members of a U.S. women's wheelchair basketball team, the linguistic and social indexing of foreignness in Japan, and the instantiation of racial authenticity among Afro-Brazilian activists.

In short, by fostering an atmosphere of collegial intimacy as well as serious intellectual exchange, we created something we both wanted and needed.

Organizing and Sustaining the Meeting

Planning and facilitating this workshop-conference required coordination within and between linguistic anthropology students and faculty at UCSD and the UA. Early on, we recognized the importance of building organizational memory around the event and laid groundwork for it to continue as the three of us moved into new stages of our own training and became less directly involved. We aimed for long-term sustainability, looking to examples such as the Michicagoan Graduate Student Conference in Linguistic Anthropology and the CLIC/LISO Conferences (Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture at University of California, Los Angeles and the Language, Interaction, and Social Organization unit at University of California, Santa Barbara). And for its duration, Sandrizona provided a unique opportunity for supporting the regional vibrancy of linguistic anthropology in the midst of institutional flux. (At the UA alone, for example, faculty retirements and relocations, along with university-wide policy changes in hiring practices, have resulted in a smaller overall program, even as the joint PhD program in Anthropology and Linguistics (ANLI) contin-

ues to attract students interested in a variety of linguistic anthropological projects.)

Organizational Nuts 'n' Bolts

In an effort to provide continuity with our intentions, we developed a balanced approach to organizational responsibilities between the host institutions. We decided that the initial Sandrizona would be hosted by UCSD, and the second would be hosted by the UA. In this way, we brought "the desert to the ocean" and "the ocean to the desert," as our motto went, with each subsequent year. No single institution would host two meetings in a row.

To host Sandrizona, a committee of students undertook a series of coordinated tasks. These milestone responsibilities allowed for the further development of graduate student training, along both professional and academic trajectories. At minimum, hosting meant: securing funding, inviting a keynote speaker from the sister program, organizing a call for papers from students, composing and coordinating an abstract submission review committee, securing a venue that would provide adequate space and technology, providing or facilitating housing for the visiting presenters, facilitating housing and transportation for the visiting keynote speaker, producing a conference program, producing and distributing Sandrizona advertisement flyers online and around campus, and coordinating the speakers and events during Sandrizona. Throughout this process the organizing committee also needed to remain in contact with the sister institution's students, the faculty members at the host institution, and build and maintain commitment and excitement for the event.

The timing of our gatherings turned out to be of special consideration since UCSD observes a quarter system and the UA is on a semester schedule. Most Sandrizonas fell on or around the three-day President's Day weekend in mid-February, which coincided for the UA and UCSD. In addition, organizers had to factor in travel time between La Jolla and Tucson,

Figure 1. Participants at Sandrizona 2009, featuring keynote faculty Rupert Stasch (center), gathered in the UA School of Anthropology Grad Commons to hear presentations.

Figure 2. Sandrizona 2011 participants included (L to R), first row: Priscilla Shin, Haleema Welji, Jessica Nelson, Melanie McComsey, Sara Goico, and Ashley Stinnett; second row: Bryan Gordon, Shane McClain, Charles Norton, Candler Hallman, and keynote faculty John Haviland.

Figure 3. John Haviland chats with Li Xiaoting during Sandrizona 2010, while Ashley Stinnett and Elizabeth Peacock consult in the background.

Figure 4. Sandrizona 2017 participants included (L to R), front row: Rachel Bristol, Maisa Taha, Elizabeth Peacock, Mary-Caitlyn Valentinsson, Ashley Stinnett, Haleema Welji, and Jessica Nelson; back row: Taciana Pontes, Tom-Ze Da Silva, Rachel Hicks, Jessica Ray, Kevan Joe, Maya Klein, Bill Cotter, Qing Zhang, Elizabeth Kickham, and Aaron Graybill.

as well as time zone differences due to Daylight Savings Time to allow visiting students to make the six-hour trek by car caravan.

As the majority of event coordination in the first years was cumbersome, we developed a packet of information and instructions that eventually morphed into a Sandrizona-wiki page that could be maintained online and passed down to future Sandrizona coordinators. From a blog page created during Sandrizona's first year, we also made a dedicated Facebook page to share news of upcoming meetings and help sustain connections among participants. While the transmission of these archives was most successful within each institution, rather than between them, this attention to long-term organizational details helped maintain the conference and reduced the overall burden on future students. This in turn helped the continuation of Sandrizona for eight years.

Faculty Involvement

From the beginning, UCSD and UA faculty were enthusiastic supporters of these efforts and facilitated academic collegiality and engagement through this event. Over the years, they made contributions by attending sessions throughout the conference. Even after retirement from the UA, for example, Professors Susan Philips and Jane Hill came to hear student and keynote presentations. Professors Kathryn Woolard and John Haviland spent entire days in the UCSD linguistic anthropology lab during Sandrizona weekends, offering feedback and asking key questions of presenters. In addition, the keynote faculty "swap" between institutions created an opportunity for students to hear from and interact with leaders in the study of language and culture whom they might not otherwise have had a chance to meet.

Faculty involvement was crucial to Sandrizona's continued operations in other ways, as well. Faculty at UA sponsored internal funding requests and attended presentation practice sessions to offer feedback before students travelled to the host campus. They also opened their homes for pot-

luck dinner receptions as it became clear that rising costs and falling funding levels made it more difficult to arrange a conference meal out on the town. In contrast, faculty at UCSD secured departmental support, offered to transport and house visiting keynote faculty, and often invited former student presenters to give extended presentations in the lab, as a culmination of their graduate school study.

Reflections and Challenges

Differing enrollments across the two institutions presented a challenge to sustainability. At the UA, students from the School of Anthropology as well as ANLI were central to Sandrizona's organization. With planning committees of seven to ten people annually, team members divvied up grant writing, housing arrangements, or catering options and budget management. Hosts held planning meetings a year in advance along with regular check-ins as event dates drew near. With only two or three students available to organize the meeting at UCSD, tasks unfolded in a more ad hoc fashion but also involved greater time and effort from each individual. UCSD organizers also reported struggling from time to time to recruit participants. Oftentimes, other UCSD anthropology graduate students were hesitant to participate, thinking that their research was not "linguistic enough" for Sandrizona. Graduate students from other departments with a focus on language— such as communication studies, linguistics, and cognitive science—were recruited from time to time, but often found the anthropological perspective a bit too unfamiliar to them. In short, interdisciplinary participation was a key goal for those at UCSD from the start, but a goal that was not reflected more widely on campus. And in 2016, UCSD students made a strategic decision not to hold the event due to the time commitment involved and the challenge of having very few people managing all of the conference logistics. Instead, those attending the AAA meetings—a subset of potential Sandrizona-goers—opted to meet informally there. Over the years, organizers at both institutions increasingly promoted wider participation, accept-

ing presentations by both graduate and advanced undergraduate students doing a variety of language oriented research, with UA students drawing in participants from linguistics, American Indian studies, education, and modern languages; and UCSD students successfully recruiting peers from the subfields of cultural and psychological anthropology.

Such challenges are part and parcel of organizing this kind of forum. The potential benefit of Sandrizona in terms of connections and experience had to be balanced against the reality of graduate students' contributing their labor in the midst of scholarship and teaching responsibilities. It may also be that, as the academic job market grows more competitive, it behooves students to set their sights on prominent regional, national, and international presentation venues in order to nurture professional networks beyond their own campuses. At the same time, organizing a workshop-conference as a graduate student is a valuable experience that echoes the type of service work prized at four-year comprehensive universities and potentially setting candidates apart on the job market.

In light of these complexities, it is also worth acknowledging that Sandrizona was founded in a kind of practical idealism. We felt that creating an intentionally supportive space for examining our own and others' work would not only nurture our professional development, but also create a sense of disciplinary community. For this reason, we created gift-giving rituals in which the visiting cohort would present their hosts with memorabilia from the partner university. We stayed on each other's couches or stretched out on hosts' floors in sleeping bags. We talked for hours during meals, happy hours, and in the car on trips between Midtown Tucson and La Jolla. We strengthened connections both between and within our programs while testing our growing mettle as scholarly practitioners.

The importance of this dual commitment is borne out in the comments of several past participants who were consulted for this essay. They emphasized the open collegiality of the meetings and the opportunity to work through emerging analyses. One remarked that, as a new graduate student, he

had appreciated seeing "people at all stages of their careers participating in organizing and giving talks" and that it gave him the chance "to see that this thing called grad school was something that we could all do, and that Sandrizona was a space where we could come together with those half-formed ideas and work them out, supporting each other with useful feedback, and encouraging each other to keep going." Another, who went on to serve on the Sandrizona organizing committee in subsequent years, noted that she especially liked "how much autonomy grad students had over the planning and direction of the gatherings." She said she felt inspired "to […] be a part of building up that kind of intellectual community." A third noted that, through Sandrizona, she found a group of colleagues that she continues to depend on.

Still, where we aimed for process-oriented intellectual exchange, we may have erred in favor of informality. As one past participant and organizer explained, he benefitted from the intimate two-way exchange regarding his work and learned a lot from running the meeting itself, but he also "felt that the conceptualization of Sandrizona opened up a moral hazard—that intimate and informal meant less effort and rigor." Another noted that as she moved toward the final stages of her degree, she found it harder to get critical feedback from Sandrizona meetings. Such observations illuminate a need to be addressed in any future similar efforts. What we sacrificed in the tightness of the 15-minute conference presentation (with its inevitably-too-short discussion) we might have regained by establishing the means for deeper debate: circulating conference papers among participants ahead of time or organizing a discussion focusing on a handful of key readings or emerging trends in linguistic anthropology.

In the end, given the flexibility of Sandrizona's premise, outcomes were reliant upon its changing constituency who, as part of their respective programs, shaped what was possible and what conversations unfolded. This, in itself, is an apt reflection of our field and profession. How we contribute within the contextual affordances and limitations of our institutions and professional societies (such as the AAA, Society

for Linguistic Anthropology, or Linguistic Society of America) marks our scholarly contribution as part of a larger picture of inquiry and discovery. Indeed, the changing themes and emphases of Sandrizona meetings over the years have pointed to the continuing evolution of linguistic anthropological interests.

Concluding Remarks: The Evolving Conversation

Such breadth of conversation speaks to the multidisciplinary relevance of linguistic anthropological knowledge. The broadly constructivist approach used in linguistic anthropological analyses, grounded in detailed ethnographic methodologies including audio and video documentation, make possible a nuanced understanding of how language acts as a dynamic matrix for thought and action, material experience, and the shaping of everyday human struggles and resiliency. Increasingly, this means using academic knowledge to propel real change in the world –and this was something we saw reflected in the presentations for the tenth Sandrizona meeting, hosted at the UA in February 2017. As invited keynote speakers returning to the meeting for the first time in several years, we were also audience to a vibrant and varied line-up of student research that spanned analytic approaches and theoretical frameworks but placed social change and community engagement at the center of their agendas. We took that opportunity to reflect on the evolution of our own thinking and training in linguistic anthropology, and we do so now by way of ending this essay and sharing how our involvement with Sandrizona–as graduate students and now as tenure-track faculty–inform our growing perspectives on our field.

      First, the efforts of Sandrizona scholars to connect with others beyond our fields remains an important goal for linguistic anthropologists. And it remains a difficulty, as interdisciplinary engagement cannot be a one-way street: all parties must recognize the value of the other. As linguistic anthropologists, this means that we must reach out to others who are open to listening to our voices, neither speaking into the

echo chamber nor towards the brick wall of those who refuse to listen. In terms of scholarship, this means reaching out to others in similarly marginalized fields, reaching out to those at one's own institutions, and engaging in collaborative research earlier and more frequently. It is increasingly important for us to publish in interdisciplinary journals and in journals outside of anthropology and linguistics, as well as to seek feedback from scholars outside of our field.

In terms of teaching, we can bring linguistic anthropology "to the masses" by developing general education courses that draw upon linguistic anthropology but are designed for undergraduates with no prior experience in the field. Furthermore, making connections with faculty from other majors and programs can help us better communicate the value of what we do to students beyond anthropology and linguistics. This may involve cross-listing courses with other departments, or having them approved as electives in programs beyond our home departments.

And in terms of service, our involvement with Sandrizona was training ground for contributing to our home departments, institutions, and wider academic organizations by promoting interdisciplinarity. Because language, and the politics of its everyday use, are fundamental to meaning making across human experience, bringing this insight to the fore through scholarly service, as well as service to communities, can also help bridge the gap between academics and non-academics. Sandrizona presentations over the years have modeled keen attention to the social impacts of linguistic practices. These are findings that can sensitize communities to the multi-dimensional struggles and triumphs of different groups. We therefore encourage scholars to seek ways to share their work with communities, such as through public library or museum programs.

Indeed, there seems to be increasing interest—by the undergraduates we teach, by the agencies that fund us, and especially by those of us working on social justice issues—in engaging with the communities we study at a deeper level, in order to develop concrete solutions to the problems they face.

We have seen some of this with the creation of the Committee on Language and Social Justice by the Society for Linguistic Anthropology. Thus far, the Committee has sought to replace the use of "illegal" to refer to migrants in the media, to refocus discourses of "language gaps" among disadvantaged children to highlight wider structural inequalities, and to denounce the use of racist mascots by sports teams.

Importantly, the last Sandrizona meeting illustrated the increased visibility of "insider" researchers, those who come from and work closely with the communities they research. Anthropology has always been saddled by its colonial roots, and many programs struggle to recruit and retain students and faculty of color. It is commendable that Sandrizona featured such scholars in 2017. However, we can do more. For example, when seeking submissions for conferences, we need to remember to also send calls to graduate student organizations that are not discipline specific, and personally encourage individuals to participate who might not take the risk on their own from a wide array of communities and scholarship backgrounds. Just as we are open to a variety of methods in researching language issues, we also need to allow for a variety of styles in presenting findings and results.

Lastly, we recognize that the practical skills learned in hosting and participating in Sandrizona become more relevant as students progress through the academy. While we acknowledged above that the burden of hosting Sandrizona can be overwhelming and disproportionate among individuals and institutions, we also suggest that these 'soft' skills are critical in the formation of active scholarship. Being able to negotiate and attend to a multiplicity of needs across a group of individuals is a critical professional skill. Organizing schedules, working with granting agencies and staff to provide funding, communicating goals, and creating an environment where people are able, willing, and feel welcome to contribute are essential to the task of the professorate. With Sandrizona we tried to facilitate this professionalization within a flexible and supportive community.

References

American Anthropological Association. 2016. "AnthroGuide 2016-2017." *American Anthropological Association* website. Accessed September 29, 2017. http://www.aaanet.org/guide.

Appendix

List of Sandrizona keynote speakers and titles by year and venue:

Spring 2009, UCSD: Norma Mendoza-Denton, "Biomechanics of Language and Gesture"

Fall 2009, UA: Rupert Stasch, "Some Everyday Language of White Primitivism: Textual Features and Textual Effects in Travel Writing about Korowai of West Papua"

Spring 2010, UCSD: Jennifer Roth Gordon, "Race, Order, and Progress: Linguistic Encounters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil"

Spring 2011, UA: John Haviland, "Metaspace and Metaiconicity in an Emerging Sign Language"

Spring 2012, UCSD: Qing Zhang, "Warring Standards: Contestation over indexical order in Cosmopolitan Mandarin"

Spring 2013, UA: Esra Ozyurek, "Being German, Becoming Muslim: Religious Conversion, Islamophobia, and Belonging in Germany"

Spring 2014, UCSD: Susan Philips, "Scale and Scaling in the Tongan Court Hierarchy"

Spring 2015, UA: Ana Celia Zentella, "Occupying Language: Combating Linguistic Inequality with Anthropological Linguistics"

Spring 2017, UA, Co-founders Panel:
> Maisa Taha, "Reflections on a Training in
> Linguistic Anthropology"
> Ashley Stinnett, "Crosslingpology: Applying linguistic
> anthropology across disciplines and subfields"
> Elizabeth Peacock, "Linguistic Anthropology at
> a Teaching College"