

The Linguistic Anthropology Workshop and LIMB present:

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## "Meta-Iconic Regimentation: Portability and Two Clines of Semiotic Motivation in an Emerging Manual Communication System in a Mayan Community"

Monday, October 5, 2009, 12:30-2p.m.

Linguistic Anthropology Laboratory, SSRB (formerly CRB) 340



Abstract:

This paper presents preliminary results from a first generation "family" sign language developing in a Tzotzil (Mayan)-speaking village in highland Chiapas, Mexico. The family includes three profoundly deaf individuals who have never met other deaf people, never been exposed to another sign language, hardly been to school, and, indeed, had virtually no contact with speakers of any language other than Tzotzil. The deaf individuals range between about 18 to 28 years of age, and there is one intermediate hearing sibling who has grown up using and contributing to a shared communicative system, along with a slightly younger hearing niece. Finally, a 28 month old child is simultaneously acquiring his mother and uncles' homesign and spoken Tzotzil. Intensive fieldwork on this emerging language, supported by the NSF, began in early 2008.

The paper concentrates on a central issue in the emergence of linguistic signs: the interplay between iconic, indexical, and symbolic modalities. Previous research on manual gesture in Tzotzil allows direct attention to putative semiotic sources for this homesign, as well as potential conceptual commonalities between the matrix Mayan language and the emerging sign language. In particular this paper will discuss both natural observation and semi-experimental results about emerging color discriminations, referential symbols, the nature of "portable" lexicalized signs which can be emancipated from the immediate context of speaking, and nascent processes of what might be called meta-iconic regimentation.