Becoming Chinese medicine:
Ideologies of Language and Experience in U.S. Chinese medical education

Sonya Pritzker
UCLA Department of Anthropology

At the core of the heated debates surrounding the standardization of terminology and the translation of texts from Chinese to English in the increasingly international field of 'traditional' Chinese medicine lies the issue of education, and how English-speaking students learning Chinese medicine in translation are best socialized into the language and practice of acupuncture and herbal medicine. One of the central points of contention in this regard concerns the relationship of language to experience, with debate participants from every sphere arguing over the ideal way to relate embodied and clinical experience to language within an educational context. In this data session, we will examine several video and audio clips where students and teachers in an American Chinese medical program are speaking overtly about language and the relationship of language to experience, embodiment, and learning. These clips will be presented specifically in terms of the ideologies of language that they reveal, which are also necessarily ideologies of experience, education, authority, and authenticity. We will thus be focusing on verb choices, metaphors, and explicit statements about language and experience in order to discern some of the ideologies that shape interaction and learning in U.S. Chinese medical education. We will also discuss the ways in which such ideologies are related to the broad context of complementary/alternative medicine in the contemporary U.S., as well as to the historical and linguistic context of the translation and globalization of Chinese medicine. It is my hope that this discussion will offer the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues and to further develop this core aspect of my dissertation through discussion.