

1993-94

SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Alexandre Kimenyi

*Professor of Linguistics
French and Ethnic Studies*
Recipient

AWARD LECTURE:

ICONICITY OF LANGUAGE

Tuesday, May 3, 1994

4:00 p.m.

Music Recital Hall

Reception to follow, Courtyard Outside Music Recital Hall

Co-hosted by the Office of the President,
The Research and Creative Activity Committee and
the Office of Research and Graduate Studies



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

THE SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

1961-62

Thomas Williams, Anthropology
"Custom and Civilization"

1962-63

Joseph McGowan, History
"History-Myth or Science"

1963-64

John Mizelle, Biological Sciences
"Parasitism, Parasites and Research"

1964-65

Irving McKee, English
"The Intellectual Game"

1965-66

Gloria Cline, History
"The Hudson's Bay Company as a Source
for North American Research"

1966-67

Rodney Sime, Chemistry
"The Structure of Education in Germany:
A Comparison with California"

1967-68

Trevor Davey
Boris Kaufman, Mechanical Engineering
"Design of Prosthetic Heart Valves"

1968-69

Richard W. Fish, Chemistry
"Description of Research in Organometallic Chemistry"

1969-70

Kenneth Kerri, Civil Engineering
"Allocation of Water for Water Quality Control"

1970-71

Ian P. McGreal, Philosophy
"Puritan and Primitive: The Divided American"

1972-73

Rebecca P. Parkin, English
"Utopian Vision and Political Expedience: Alexander
Pope's 'Feathered People' Versus the Hogs of Westphaly"

1973-74

Joan Hoff Wilson, History
"Herbert Hoover: Hero of the New Left?"

1975-76

Albert Cook, Electrical Engineering
"Biomedical Engineering: The Case for Interdisciplinary
Dialogue"

1976-77

Charles L. Hagopian, Mathematics and Statistics
"Basic Ideas and Applications of Topology"

1976-77

Eugene B. Redmond, English
"Origins of Afro-American Ritual Expression:
Or, In Search of the Soular System"

1977-78

Robert L. Curry, Economics
"Bloodbath in Southern Africa: Can It Be Avoided?"

1978-79

Lester H. Gabriel, Civil Engineering
"Why Not Research?"

1979-80

William Allen, Art
"Transient Poet"

1980-81

Frederick Reardon, Mechanical Engineering
"Some Energy Alternatives for the Eighties and Beyond"

1981-82

Stephen L. Harris, Humanities
"The Fires Next Time: Learning to Live With Our
Western Volcanoes"

1982-83

Fausto Avendano, Foreign Languages
"The American Immigrant Experience: The Case of the
Portuguese Immigrant as Seen Through Literature"

1982-83

John van Gigh, Management
"The Meaning of Truth"

1983-84

Miklos Udvardy, Biological Sciences
"Biogeography and Biological Conversation"

1984-85

Mary Mackey, English
"The Past Recaptured: Time From a Novelist's
Perspective"

1985-86

John W. Connor, Anthropology
"Changing Trends in Achievement Motivation in
Japanese and American Students"

1986-87

Mary E. Giles, Humanities
"The Ecstatic Scholar"

1987-88

Donald E. Hall, Physics
"The Shaping of Science By Communication,
Technology, and Imagination"

1988-89

Sue (Chung Sul Youn) Kim, Chemistry
"Design and Synthesis of Polymers Through Analysis of
Structure—Property Relationship" (Non-Technical
Presentation)

1989-90

Dennis Schmitz, English
"Poetry as Re-search"

1990-91

Irv Faria, Physical Education
"Physiological Determinants of Human Performance"

1991-92

William A. Dorman, Journalism
"The Press and Global Conflict:
Beyond the Cold War"

1992-93

M. Hossein Partovi, Physics
"Of Time, Uncertainty, Chaos and the Sound of Light"

ICONICITY OF LANGUAGE

Alexandre Kimenyi

Inquiry into the genesis and dynamism of linguistic signs and structures lends support to the classification of signs and structures by Charles Peirce into three categories namely icons, indices and symbols depending on their respective degree of transparency with the referents they stand for and to the theory of grammaticization which shows that grammar comes from linguistic items which stand for basic and concrete concepts through the processes of tropicality, decategorization, desemanticization and phonetic erosion. An isomorphism is shown to exist between linguistic structures and conceptual structures which in turn parallel real world structures. Language is a reflection of the mind and the mind a reflection of the real world. What has led linguists to claim that linguistic signs and structures are arbitrary is the asymmetry found in these respective structures. The real world consists of an infinite number of phenomena and experiences but the linguistic system is made up of a finite number of signs and structures. This small number of rules and lexical items is responsible for polysemy and homonymy found not only in all languages of the world but in all semiotic systems as well. This finiteness is, however, a requirement for the system to function. The linguistic system has to be economical, abstract and be able to make generalizations. Signs and structures in their genesis are iconic and later become symbols when used universally and frequently. Iconicity is either paradigmatic or syntagmatic. Sound symbolism, reduplication and isomorphism between words and their meanings are clear cases of paradigmatic iconicity. Syntagmatic iconicity can be seen, for instance, in the English binomial idiomatic expressions in which the binomials are phonetically and semantically associated. The demotion and promotion of grammatical relations which result in losing or acquiring certain grammatical properties is also an instance of iconic structure as shown in English, by the dative shift movement, possessor promotion and particle advancement. Since new experiences and concepts are explained in reference to older ones, the old linguistic forms then are also given new meanings or functions, here the genesis of tropes. All languages use the same types of tropes. These are drawn from words which refer to shared and basic experiences such as body parts and their functions, anthropocentrism, animacy, and space.

Deiconization or grammaticization resulting from tropicalization is universal. Some categories are basic whereas others are derived. All function words, such as prepositions, articles, conjunctions, clitics, affixes, tense-aspect-modality morphology come from nouns and verbs. For instance, in many languages of the world, spatial prepositions such as 'over', 'under' and 'inside', come, respectively, from the expressions "the sky of", "the earth of", and "the stomach of".

I conclude by showing that since language is iconic and reflects people's experiences then there is linguistic relativity or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, since linguistic structures parallel people's concept of their real world. The implications to linguistic theory is that language has to be approached panchronically as opposed to the synchronic and diachronic approaches, the latter being restricted only to historical linguistics. It is necessary because language is dynamic through space and time as shown by not only linguistic change but also by synchronic linguistic variation. To adequately describe and explain the genesis and dynamism of signs and structures in all semiotic systems, the same approach outlined here has to be used.

Alexandre Kimenyi

Dr. Alexandre Kimenyi, Professor of Linguistics, French and Ethnic Studies is the thirty-third recipient of the **Outstanding Scholarly Achievement Award**. This award is given annually to a CSUS faculty member who has, over many years, made significant contributions to a discipline through scholarly activity, creative/artistic endeavors, research and publication.

Professor Kimenyi has been a member of the CSUS faculty since 1976. He is the author of seven books including *A Relational Grammar of Kinyarwanda*; *Studies in Kinyarwanda and Bantu Phonology*; *Kinyarwanda and Kirundi Names: A Semiolinguistic Analysis of Bantu Onomastics*; and *A Tonal Grammar of Kinyarwanda: An Augmental and Metrical Analysis*. In addition he has authored over eighty articles and papers. He received his B.A. degree from the Institut Pédagogique National Butare, Rwanda. His M.A. and Ph.D. in Linguistics are both from UCLA.

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