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Colonizing Ice Age America)

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Evans's unfortunate title *Dying Words* misses the mark that his book otherwise strikes squarely. According to its subtitle, the book is about "endangered languages and what they have to tell us," but in fact it is about *languages* and what they have to tell us. Evans's book is one of the most penetrating and insightful works we have had on language for years. It does not deserve to be relegated to a specialist literature on language endangerment when its subject is the very essence of human language and its diversity: the life and growth of languages, not their death and demise. The task for this literature is not to convince readers that dying languages should not die. It is to convince them that living languages are invaluable and should live. The rest will follow.

So is the loss of linguistic diversity a bad thing? Well, if you are already inclined to think so, yes. And if you are a linguist, it is very bad, both professionally—because your ability to carry out your work is increasingly compromised—and personally—because the thing you love is being destroyed. Hagège's assessment is that "the decline in the diversity of languages is, in the long run, the decline of linguistics itself" (p. 201). For neighboring disciplines, the knock-on effects are enough that language extinction will at least be truly unfortunate. Evans and Hagège each makes a powerful case. Will the greater audience be convinced? Some, perhaps many, may doubt the presumption of an inherent good in scientific work that forms the main moral basis for these authors' arguments. Should research on minority languages be a priority? Or is it a counterproductive distraction and a misplacement of funds needed for more important things: water, sanitation, health, transport, education? The issue is raised by David Kaiser (2009:19) concerning the extraordinary expense of particle physics research: "Why spend billions of euros to smash subatomic particles together?" His explanation—that the physicists need to find a framework through which seemingly arbitrary yet powerful facts about natural forces should seem natural—essentially translates into the career needs of the physicists and the delight they gain from exploring these questions. It is interesting to ask why this is supported, or at least tolerated, by the taxpayer.

At the core of it is our innate fascination with the idea that truth can be very different from what it seems. Particle physics shows us that mass is actually 95% nothing, which is intriguing because it is so counterintuitive. If true, it means that the messages we get from our dearly trusted senses of vision, hearing, and touch do not, in fact, reflect how the world really is, or at least, that if we had different sensory apparatus we would see that our truth is just one version of the way things really are. Whorf's work in the 1930s and 1940s raised this possibility for language, a possibility hinted at by Hagège and explored systematically in Evans's book: the possibility that learning another language gives us a new set of spectacles for beholding and understanding the world, an alternative to the one supplied by our own familiar native language. Whorf recommended studying Native American languages as a way of opening up our minds to the subjective nature of our own

native version of things, not only in order to learn other ways of construing the world but also to bring into view the normally overlooked peculiarities of our own trusted conceptual systems. Because of the radical ways languages can differ, he argued, none of us is "free to describe nature with absolute impartiality" (Whorf 1956:214). The study of linguistic diversity gives us a way out, delivering nothing less than a balanced view of reality: "The person most nearly free in such respects would be a linguist familiar with very many widely different linguistic systems" (Whorf 1956:214). Hence Evans's dictum for devotees of diversity (p. 155): "we study other languages because we cannot live enough lives" (a phrase adapted from literary critic Harold Bloom [2000:19], who said, "We read . . . because we cannot know enough people").

Our sense of wonder at what we learn from the physicists is evidently enough to garner our support for their expensive pursuits. To expect the same in the domain of language will similarly require the large-scale creation of wonder. Evans and Hagège contribute handsomely to this project, shoring up foundations laid by recent predecessors. While technical solutions like affordable recording equipment and archiving technology are immensely convenient for the work that needs to be done, they are neither necessary nor sufficient for solving the scientific problems of language endangerment. If there is any hope of arriving at the cultural solutions needed, it is through fostering a modern tradition of marvel at linguistic diversity.

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Paleoindian Archaeology and Archaeologists

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First Peoples in a New World: Colonizing Ice Age America.
By David J. Meltzer. Berkeley: University of California
Press, 2009.

In this volume, Meltzer admirably summarizes the literature and debates on the peopling of the Americas, from the earliest thinking on the subject to arguments in progress. He sets the stage by telling us what he hopes to accomplish and his own biases; then he dives into the task of providing the best single synthesis of Paleoindian archaeology produced to date. Successive chapters detail late Pleistocene environments (“The Landscape of Colonization: Glaciers, Climates, and Environments of Ice Age North America”) and the history of the research over the past several centuries that has resulted in the hard-won knowledge we currently have about the colonization and early settlement of the Americas (“From Paleoliths to Paleoindians,” “The Pre-Clovis Controversy and Its Resolution,” “Non-archaeological Answers to Archaeological Questions,” and “American Origins: The Search for Consensus”). The latter two chapters provide excellent overviews of the contributions research in human skeletal biology, linguistics, and genetics have provided about the first Americans.

Along the way, explanations are clearly presented for a wide range of complex phenomena, such as Milankovitch glacial cycles, paleoenvironmental conditions (including changes in the ranges of plants and animals), genetic evidence, and the difficulties of working with radiocarbon determinations in the remote past. Multidisciplinary in approach, Meltzer deftly and succinctly explores the challenges of reconciling the many different and sometimes contradictory data sets and lines of reasoning used in the exploration of the peopling of the Americas. Later chapters explore major areas of ongoing research on subjects such as migration and colonization theory (“What Do You Do When No One’s Been There Before?”), the dramatic changes in biota that occurred at the end of the last ice age (“Clovis Adaptations and Pleistocene Extinctions”), and the events in the centuries immediately following the Clovis horizon, the first widespread evidence for settlement (“Settling In: Late Paleoindians and the Waning Ice Age”). The author’s own contributions on these subjects have been substantial, and while he clearly believes that certain outcomes are more plausible than others, he presents the major thinking and lines of evidence on these subjects. The volume concludes with a perspective from the present and recent past, a review of the effect of the past half-millennium of Old World contact on Native Americans (“When Past and Present Collide”). The chapter and indeed the whole book eloquently show how archaeological study of the remote past can help us understand topics and trends of great relevance to the modern world, such as how humans respond to dramatic climate change, large-scale extinctions, and range shifts in plant and animal communities.

This is a thoughtful, detailed, and well-written volume that is accessible to scholars, beginning college students, and laypeople alike, who should enjoy and appreciate the honest,

straightforward writing style, interjected here and there with more than a touch of humor and sometimes blunt but always well-reasoned commentary. The text is made particularly accessible to the nonscholarly reader by the deliberate exclusion of embedded citations, which often seem interminable in some writings on the subject of the peopling of the Americas. Numerous footnotes, however, provide appropriate and indeed typically exhaustive scholarly documentation and follow-up commentary; readers interested in full details would be advised to read them in tandem with the text. Meltzer states the evidence and acknowledges the contributions of his colleagues directly in the text and in footnotes, even when disagreeing, sometimes strongly, with their reasoning.

While Paleoindian archaeology has attracted many fine scientists and strong personalities, Meltzer refreshingly makes it clear that the knowledge we currently have on the subject is increasingly a collaborative effort, the result of the hard work of many people working together, even where they agree to disagree. Given the decidedly idiosyncratic or self-aggrandizing perspectives seen in some of the recent books—and writing one’s memoirs or views on the peopling of the Americas has become something of a cottage industry in recent years—Meltzer’s openness is refreshing, reflecting and reinforcing his reputation for intellectual honesty. It is, however, not an approach that will appeal to everyone, especially those colleagues whose arguments he disagrees with or whose evidence he finds shaky. He pulls no punches in letting the reader know what he thinks about the major recent and not-so-recent controversies in the history of Paleoindian archaeology: among many others, such subjects as late Pleistocene extinctions, interpretations of the genetic and linguistic evidence, differentiating naturally and culturally produced artifacts, and the debates around the excavation, dating, and interpretation of classic sites such as Meadowcroft, Folsom, and Monte Verde.

Extended boxed asides provide a more personal and detailed accounting of major debates currently or recently raging in the archaeology of early America or of more technical matters critical to understanding the subject; these include “On Dates and Dating,” “The Younger Dryas: It Came from Outer Space,” “A Visit to Monte Verde,” “And Then There Was Kennewick,” and “Is Overkill Dead?” to cite a few examples. In each aside, the history, evidence, and arguments raised on the subject are deftly summarized, with Meltzer’s own thinking on the subject clearly, humorously, and sometimes quite tersely interwoven into the discussion, often including his thoughts on the way science or logic should be employed to explore such topics. His aside on “Looking for Clovis in All the Wrong Places” examines the repeated interest in finding European origins for early New World technology, from Sandia in the 1940s to the recently proposed “Solutrean,” or Atlantic-ice-edge, hypothesis of Bradley and Stanford, which he clearly does not think much of, albeit for excellently detailed reasons. The asides cover perhaps the most important or controversial of contemporary topics, but there

are discussions throughout the volume that could also have been set apart in such a fashion.

Throughout the book, Meltzer rarely tackles topics about which he does not offer his own thoughts and conclusions. The writing might be seen as opinionated, but at least it is superbly informed and reasoned opinion, presenting all sides of the argument. As much a book on how science occurs as on archaeology, it offers insight into the mind of a scientist at the center of most of the important debates in his chosen area of study. It thus reminds me in some ways of James Watson's classic *The Double Helix*, which shows how science is as much about the process as it is about the outcomes.

I regularly teach a course on the peopling of the Americas to advanced undergraduates and graduate students. Before this volume appeared, the participants had to read many separate papers and monographs on the subject to cover the same ground. *First Peoples in a New World* provides a framework on which such a readings course could be built, and I plan to use it as such in the years to come. The price for the volume is reasonable, and indeed, given the 16 gorgeous full-color plates of Paleoindian artifacts and numerous line drawings, it is a bargain in today's world of inflated scholarly pricing and publishing. I know that my students will love it for that reason alone, although once they get into the text, I expect them to be quickly caught up in the debate about how our knowledge of the past comes about. Given the pace at which knowledge on the subject is increasing, I hope that Meltzer will write an update in 15 years or so. As a detailed look into how a major player thinks about developments in his field of study and the give and take of how science proceeds, however, this book will never be truly dated.

Your Best Professional Judgment: Review Panels at Work

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How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment. By Michèle Lamont. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Despite its title, *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* is not about professorial reasoning in the halls of academe. Instead, Harvard sociologist Michèle Lamont's goal is to reveal the hidden world of what transpires off-campus when academics come together to form review

panels, assess claims for excellence, and award fellowships and grants for scholarly research. Her study is more aptly named by the title of the book's first chapter, "Opening the Black Box of Peer Review." We all have a stake here, so I am happy to report at the outset that the news from the front is good. Despite real and pressing constraints of time and structure, not to mention daunting disciplinary diversity, the panelists whom Lamont observed and interviewed usually reached consensual decisions and reported pride in a fair process and a job well done. Still, those of us with long experience of academia cannot help but wonder: How is this possible? That, in a nutshell, is Lamont's subject.

There are, of course, multiple perspectives from which one might evaluate peer review. Some observers, following Robert K. Merton's seminal essay "The Normative Structure of Science" (1979 [1942]), maintain that scientific progress depends on consensus about standards and the application of universalistic rather than particularistic criteria. Others, including Pierre Bourdieu, report that because academic evaluation is inseparable from its milieu, cultural capital, status competition, and other factors inevitably compromise Mertonian ideals. But Lamont's project was not to assess review outcomes per se. Rather, she sought to understand the process that produced them, which, like Erving Goffman and John Dewey, she characterizes as interactional problem solving grounded in the articulation of personal beliefs as well as in cognitive judgment. As one of her panelist informants, an English professor, told her,

You need to use two sets of criteria. One is . . . your best professional judgment in as neutral a way as you can manage it, independent of your taste. And the other is allowing for your tastes, if they don't get in the way of each other. I think one should always give up the personal one, if the arguments of other people seem sound, and not give up the other one. (P. 128)

Lamont studied review panels for five interdisciplinary competitions in the social sciences and the humanities: the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Field Research Program, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation's Women's Studies Dissertation Grant Program, the American Council of Learned Societies's Humanities Fellowship Program, an unnamed university's Society of Fellows, and an anonymous foundation. She observed only three panels at work, but shortly after each panel met, she conducted 90-minute phone interviews. Her interviewees included 49 panelists from 11 disciplines (17 panelists repeated service over the 2-year study and so were interviewed twice, for a total of 66 panelist interviews), 10 program directors, and five panel chairs. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions were subjected to two forms of analysis: a qualitative identification of themes and a quantitative count of theme and word frequency. Lamont herself read through the transcripts and inductively unearthed panelist evaluation criteria, particularly as they reflected dis-

¹This review is based on work supported while the author served at the National Science Foundation (NSF). Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed here