

## **The Annual OSU Martin Luther King Day Linguistics Symposium**

Since 2004, on Martin Luther King Day, a day-long symposium on some linguistic topic has been held in the Department of Linguistics. It would be nice if we could say that this started by someone saying “I have a dream ... to discuss some topic X ...” but, as with many events, it was just by chance that the first symposium came to be held at all, and furthermore held on Martin Luther King Day. Originally organized by Brian Joseph, in connection with a visit in January 2004 by two linguist friends of his who work on Greek (Angela Ralli of the University of Patras and Mark Janse of the University of Ghent), as a way of giving them a chance to offer some public lectures and of linking their talks with other work on Greek linguistics that various students, alumni, and faculty of Ohio State were engaged in, the symposium came to fall on Martin Luther King Day as that was the only day in their visit here that was free of classes and other obstacles to having several talks together. The program from that event reflects its somewhat ad hoc nature, as it was called “The First (Ever) Martin Luther King Day Symposium on Modern Greek Linguistics”. Funding for that event was provided by Joseph’s Kenneth E. Naylor Professorship in the Slavic Department.

The following year, it became apparent that there were a number of good papers that were thematically connected, all on topics involving ancient Indo-European languages, from locals, that is students, alumni, and faculty in Linguistics and related areas at OSU and environs, so that the idea of holding the symposium again seemed reasonable. Thus was born “The Second Annual OSU Martin Luther King Day Symposium on Linguistics: Studies in Ancient Indo-European Languages”, held in January 2005, again with some funding from the Naylor Professorship providing for amenities and for one outside speaker. Once such an event had been held for two years running, a generalization was emerging, one might say, as the use of “annual” in the title implies, and based on the pattern of those first two years, Joseph continued to organize a day-long workshop on a topic to which local talent could contribute. This led to the third symposium in January 2006, with the general topic of analogy, where the title of the event reflects its definite establishment as a “now-annual” event: “The 3<sup>rd</sup> Now-Annual OSU Martin Luther King Day Symposium in Linguistics: Analogy in Language Change”.

January of 2007 saw a return thematically to the Greek origins of the event, with papers on Greek linguistics being the order of the day. Funding for that day was provided again by the Naylor Professorship but also with a generous contribution from the Department of Linguistics. The broader funding base for that event, coupled with the Department’s successful bid for College of Humanities funding in OSU’s Targeted Investment in Excellence (TIE) program, led to the idea of proposing to the TIE Committee that funding for the 2008 MLK Day event come under that rubric. A joint effort -- Joseph working together with then-first-year professor Judith Tonhauser -- based on their mutual interest and experience in the indigenous languages of the Americas (Tonhauser being an expert in Yucatec Maya and Guaranî, and Joseph having far more limited experience working with Cree) led to a successful proposal under the TIE for a workshop on linguistic research on various native languages of the Americas, but with a local (i.e. Ohio dimension) by focusing on work by scholars in Ohio or who have some connection with Ohio State (whether as alumnus, student, or faculty member). Future MLK Day Symposia are to be

organized in a similar way, by looking to the research that locals (as defined here) have been engaged in and drawing on that.

Although there is no direct connection between the symposia and Martin Luther King, other than taking advantage of the day, we feel that it is entirely in keeping with the spirit of his life to have these events on this day. He is, after all, the man who said “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter;” since linguistics matters to us, we feel no need to be silent about linguistics on this day commemorating him. Moreover, his statement that “all progress is precarious, and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem” can be read as an insight into the nature of scientific research and scholarship more generally and thus endorses, we feel, on-going intellectual inquiry such as is embodied in the symposia.

The programs for the first four MLK Day Symposia can be viewed by clicking here (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007) and the tentative program for 2008 is available as well.