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**43<sup>rd</sup> Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages**  
**CUNY Graduate Center**  
**April 17, 2013 - Final iPad**

Good morning.

Allow me to begin by saying how pleased I am to be able to participate in this - the 43<sup>rd</sup> Linguistics Symposium on Romance Languages, aka LSRL43, and notably the first ever LSRL to be held in New York City. I also understand that we have one of the speakers from LSRL1 in the audience.

You will have to bear with me – I am not sure about the wisdom of asking a College President and a Geologist to welcome a group of linguists, but you invited me and I will try my best.

I feel like I bear some affinity for linguistics. As a graduate student in geology/paleontology I studied systematics and was trained in the Ernst Myer view of classification. Diagramming species relationships is not unlike parsing a sentence. Even

Charles Darwin, who was a geologist before he was an evolutionary biologist, wrote *“It may be worth while to illustrate this view of classification, by taking the case of languages.”* I know that I am treading on dangerous territory speaking to experts in the field but my training makes me appreciate understanding Origins – something I see as a possible link between our disciplines. I know I may be dating myself here but I well remember endless hours parsing and diagramming sentences in grammar school, something I don't think is done today --- and our language suffers. The diagrams later reminded me of taxonomic classification and taught me the value of logic and orderly thinking. I see Linguistics as the modern descendent of the medieval Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric although from your program it is clear that you use tools of mathematical analysis from the Quadrivium as well.

When writing of languages, I think that Darwin was suggesting that by studying the modern array of languages we can better appreciate our Origins. To me, this is Hutton’s late 18<sup>th</sup> century view that the “Present is the Key to the Past.” In my discipline,

I have spent my career studying modern volcanoes and storms (such as the recent hurricane Sandy) to better understand Earth origins. From the proverbial 50'000 foot level, I see your program as an attempt to better understand origins by examining language structure and meaning.

I am a firm believer in the power of interdisciplinary scholarship – to me the most exciting innovations come from combining the ideas and logic of two different disciplines. That this conference, one that most in the academy would view as a humanist event, is sponsored by both the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities gives me great pride in the innovation and insights of higher education in this country.

A particularly exciting LSRL program will be presented this year which has a special emphasis on Parsed Corpora, which I understand is “*an emerging area of research in Romance linguistics.*” After reading the program and many of the abstracts, I wish that I could stay for the entire day!

I want to give special mention to the members of the LSRL43 Organizing Committee – Christina Tortora, Marcel den Dikken, Frances Blanchette, Ignacio Montoya, Teresa O’Neill, and Emily Wilson – who have done such an incredible job in developing today’s program which involves some of the most prominent leaders and innovators in linguistics.

The list of presenters and your home institutions listed in the program reads as a “who’s who” list – the most prestigious institutions of higher education around the world are represented here today. Welcome to New York! I am so proud that my institution, the College of Staten Island, can co-sponsor this event along with The Graduate Center.

I want to acknowledge The CUNY Graduate Center which is serving as host today. The Graduate Center is an important “focal point of activity for the shared scholarly interests” of numerous colleges within the University, and the LSRL43 is “emblematic of the robust cooperation of CUNY linguists spread out across the five boroughs of our great city.”

The College of Staten Island has also played a central role in the organization and support of LSRL43 and Linguistics as a discipline is alive and well on the individual campuses in all five Boroughs of NY as well as here at The Graduate Center.

For those of you who have not been to the College of Staten Island, I strongly encourage you to come visit our beautiful, sprawling 204 acre campus, the only one of its kind in New York City. You can take the train to Battery Park and enjoy a free Ferry ride that many call the best views in New York and from there take a free shuttle to campus.

Recently, the Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, gave his State of the State address at the College of Staten Island and called us one of the crown jewels of the CUNY system.

Actually, the Governor said that we were *the* crown jewel, but out of respect for our host (In addition to serving as President of CSI, I hold an appointment to the doctoral faculty here at The Graduate Center) I am including The CUNY Graduate Center with us as well.

The City University of New York is a unique institution. In some respects it operates as a system and in others as a single University. One of the great benefits is that faculty on any campus can be appointed to the doctoral faculty here at the graduate center and can mentor doctoral students. This allows us on Staten Island as a campus of 14,000 to hire faculty of outstanding scholarship and also helps us provide the highest quality education for undergraduate students by having them work alongside more advanced doctoral students.

In addition to our unique campus, the College of Staten Island is also home to the CUNY Interdisciplinary High Performance Computing Center, one of the most powerful computer systems in the region. Not only do we have two latest generation Crays, we can accommodate all modern computational architecture – languages so to speak.

We are able to handle “mega” data. For example, 100 million plus taxi cab rides in the city overlain with information on train and buss routes to look for efficiencies. Or, the solar output available to NYC for each of the 13 billion square feet in the

City. Or, the most complete set of data from the Yucatan Peninsula to Canada on seafloor conditions and near shore topography that allows us to model storm surges in the NY Metropolitan area. Or a colony of Naked Mole rats each with a transponder chip that allows analysis of social behavior based on millions of observations.

I stress the interdisciplinary aspect of the Center, because it is being utilized as a valuable research tool for not only our science and technology disciplines but also for our humanities and social sciences. I believe that the range of disciplines using the center, ranging from geology, political science, economics, psychology, neuroscience, and transportation management to humanities is as unique as the world-class hardware. Indeed, one of the College's distinguished faculty members Christina Tortora is utilizing the computing system for her linguistics analysis.

And, of course, I also feel that Staten Island is a crown jewel of the New York City Boroughs. For those of you who are unaware, the Staten Island community recently experienced

tremendous tragedy and hardship due to Hurricane Sandy. However, the remarkable spirit and resiliency demonstrated by our citizens during this period of rebuilding and recovery epitomizes what Staten Island - and really what all of New York City - is truly about.

My presence and participation with LSRL43 is reflective of my affinity to these aforementioned values – the value of CUNY – The City University of New York, its colleges and communities, and the scholarship and research of those here today.

Thank you and enjoy the symposium.