

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

January 22, 2002

Bill Schlotter

Linguistic Society of America Honors UCSB Scholar

A book by Marianne Mithun, professor of linguistics at UC Santa Barbara, has won the Bloomfield Book Award, bestowed annually by the Linguistic Society of America on the best book in the field.

Mithun received the award for "The Languages of Native North America" (Cambridge University Press) at the society's annual meeting earlier this month in San Francisco.

"(The book) is a reference work of permanent value, documenting the results of a century of work on the indigenous languages of North America," read the citation that accompanied the prize.

"... The book sets new standards for scholarship in our field, and on every page demonstrates to the reader not only Mithun's deep scholarly concern but also her love and respect for the languages of this continent."

The book surveys the many indigenous languages of North America.

"There were nearly 300 mutually unintelligible languages spoken in North America at the time of first European contact," Mithun said.

"They were quite diverse, constituting well over 50 distinct language families.

... Nearly half of the languages have now disappeared, and all others, apart from Greenlandic, are endangered.

Probably no more than a couple of dozen at best will survive this century."

Mithun's book ensures that though more languages surely will fall from common spoken use, they will at least survive in archives.

Internationally known as an authority on North American indigenous languages and a grammatical theorist, Mithun was delighted to have her book recognized.

"As you can imagine," she said, "I was quite touched."

Mithun has been on the faculty at UCSB since 1986.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.