



Dwight Bolinger

## FIRST PERSON, NOT SINGULAR

DWIGHT BOLINGER  
*Harvard University*

This sketch of my professional life comes in two perspectives. The first is a glance back from the vantage point of 1974, when I first stopped to take a look. I keep the separation as something possibly interesting in itself, in the way the past views the past, and because the events recorded then were clearer in my mind than they would be now, over fourteen years later. I retouch the earlier part only to clarify it in such details as the identities of the persons named (in 1974 that would not have been necessary for most readers) and the correction of obvious errors.

1974

### I. *LSA and Reminiscences of Other Linguists*

As a card-carrying linguist, the appropriate place to start is my connection with the Linguistic Society of America. I was a late-comer to linguistics, and even later to the LSA, though I joined it in 1943. Except for one short year at Yale at the very outset, I spent the first two-thirds of my years of employment in parts of the country that made trips to annual meetings too difficult and expensive for me to enjoy many of them. It would have made a great difference to me — especially if I could have been guided into linguistics earlier — to have had such a teacher as Edward Sapir (whom I knew of through an inspiring teacher I did have, T. L. Collier of Washburn College, Topeka, Kansas, whose speciality was educational psychology). When I finally did find my way in, it was not a time when imaginations such as his were dominant, and I found myself rudderless with interests centered on the social and semantic side of language but no technical training to launch them from.

My contacts with the Society in the first ten years of my membership were so sporadic that I find it difficult even to reconstruct them. The annual meetings were usually in the same city with the Modern Language Association, and I was usually obliged to be somewhere about that more heterogeneous body. I

remember more than one dash across part of New York or Chicago on a cold December day to get in on at least one of the LSA sessions, but that happened all too seldom.

The prominent LSA figures of that time whom I knew, and others I have come to know since, I did not know through the Society but through some institutional connection. The same was true of figures who never quite made it into the hierarchy, though they belonged and had done work that should have earned them a place. One of these was William Emerson Bull, a fellow student at the University of Wisconsin in my graduate school days. He and I shared ideas on Spanish and general syntax for more than a decade during the time that we were at opposite ends of Los Angeles. Bull was as much a loner as I, but he had a stronger scientific bent and was engaged in logical forms of analysis many years before they became the fashion. I'm glad to say that his book *Time, Tense, and the Verb* (1960) is appreciated more and more by some of the younger linguists. Bull was unassuming but as outspoken as Tabasco sauce and did not have the social ladder as one of the ways up either in the Society or in Academia.

There were not many LSA people in Los Angeles to know between 1944 and 1955. Neither USC nor UCLA had a linguistics department, and what little was done was in anthropology — by Harry Hoijer at UCLA, for example — or in the language-and-literature departments. Robert Stockwell went to UCLA from the State Department about 1955, but I knew him better through membership on an MLA committee in 1956. Those were his structuralist days — before receiving the gift of transformations — and we had friendly arguments about the nature of stress and intonation. His practical experience at the Foreign Service Institute and his sponsorship of the brilliant teaching techniques of Hugo Montero drew us together later as consultants for a visual grammar project that Bull masterminded. Stockwell is the true no-nonsense linguist. We haven't always agreed but his fairness is impeccable.

Yakov Malkiel, with more mileage as a writer of linguistics than anyone else in the field, I knew for his work in Romance, but again it was his being at Berkeley that brought us together, not our membership in LSA. What appealed to me about his work was its insistence on the importance of the lexicon at a time when everybody was wild about phonology and later when the syntax fever caught on. Malkiel and his equally gifted wife María Rosa Lida were the perfect scholarly pair, it seemed to me, complementing each other on the analytic-linguistic side and on the literary side, and never forgetting the bond between the two. In 1953 I used his work as the springboard for a popular-

izing piece that I did for the *American Scholar* titled “The Life and Death of Words”, and I have found other aspects of it equally response-provoking, for example his cross-linguistic study on binominals (*thick and thin, near and far, time and tide*), which inspired a piece I did on “Binomials and Pitch Accent” (1962).

At Yale in 1943-44 there was an opportunity to meet two or three of the LSA luminaries of the time, in a social way even though I had little contact with them as LSA members or as professors. Yale had more than its share of notables. Leonard Bloomfield, Edgar H. Sturtevant, and George Trager were guests at one time or another at our house. By that time Bloomfield was already rather frail, and was a small, gentle, white-haired person, full of good conversation. I wish I might have known him as a teacher. Trager was a thin, rather taciturn man, who addressed a meal like a business proposition. Sturtevant, the historicist, was the strikingest figure of the three and also the sprightliest conversationalist, for all his nearly seventy years. He took our seven-year-old into his confidence and held him spellbound with stories he had made up for his grandchildren.

After Yale, there was no linguistics *group* that I had anything approaching close dealings with until the 1950's when my friendship with Fred W. Householder, Jr. bloomed into an invitation to come to Indiana for a lecture. Fred is a classicist by training, who made himself an expert in Uralic-Altaic studies and has taught everything from Modern Greek to Great Books. I had begun corresponding with him in 1947 when he was still at Allegheny College. The occasion for that was our mutual interest in phonesthemes, which have been rediscovered of late and are getting attention as universals. The visit to Indiana was in the spring of 1951, and gave me a chance to know Tom Sebeok and Charles and Florence Voegelin, besides getting to know Fred and his family a little better. These are friendships that have continued. Also the visit gave me an appreciation of the Indiana group of linguists as one of the best-balanced in the country, a reputation they enhanced with the founding of the journal *Language Sciences*. Householder I think is the best critic our field has, and a highly original thinker besides, and it annoys me that he has not received the recognition he deserves. [Author's note (1989): This neglect was properly reversed soon after 1974. With almost a hundred dissertations written under his direction, his students, many of whom have themselves become leaders in the field, have seen to that. He was president of LSA in 1981 (see Al Ani 1984).]

Sebeok's accomplishments of course need no emphasizing. His acquaintance with everybody — here and abroad — and his awareness of everything

that is going on and participation in a lot of it himself, his powers as an organizer and his untiring energy have made him the most dynamic figure in LSA.

The talk that I gave at Indiana was published later in *PMLA* as "Linear Modification" (1952, 1965). It put me in touch for the first time with the Prague group of linguists, including Jan Firbas, Josef Vachek, Ivan Poldauf, Jiří Nosek, and Ivan Dubský. They had been working along the same lines, following the lead of Vilém Mathesius, in their ideas on the communicative dynamism of the sentence. Also I had done a piece on the independence of writing as a system that fitted in with Vachek's thoughts, which have just come to fruition this past year in his book entitled *Written Language* (1973). I mention these associations to contrast them with the reception that "Linear Modification" had here at home, which was scarcely a ripple. Hockett wrote an appreciative note saying that he had been toying with similar ideas. Bloch — when I had earlier submitted the article to him for consideration in *Language* — was simply perplexed. The literary half of him said 'yes', the linguistic half said 'no'. I think his bidisciplinary quandary may entertain you, so I am including his letter of rejection as part of this record. I wonder sometimes whether Bloch's usefulness to language on the literary side is valued as highly as it ought to be. He was a stylist himself, and in more than one letter of rejection he complained of the dullness of the prose he had to contend with.

#### LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Bernard Bloch		Yale Graduate
	School	
Editor of Publications		New Haven,
	Conn.	
	29 May 1951	

Dear Mr. Bolinger:

It sounds hypocritical or even downright dishonest to say that I thoroughly enjoyed reading your paper on Linear Modification; and yet it's perfectly true. You write so well (if I may mention the fact without impertinence), your style is so smooth and yet so witty, and your examples are so cleverly chosen, that it always gives me genuine pleasure to read your stuff; I find it's like reading one of the lighter essayists, or even a novel. And yet — and yet. Maybe that's precisely what's wrong with your articles — or rather, precisely what I find it necessary to object to: that they are clever causeries, belletristic essays about (around and about) a linguistic subject, rather than the tightly argued, technically oriented articles they might be. I hope I don't mean that a good linguistic article is necessarily a dry-as-dust performance, no more to be enjoyed as reading-matter than a well-constructed

time table: certainly I don't *think* I mean this. In fact, what I object to in your grammatical disquisitions, including this latest one, is by no means the style itself (I admire the style no end) but rather the pervading essayistic approach, the tendency to argue a linguistic problem almost exclusively in terms of cleverly chosen examples, especially the habit of treating each grammatical point as if it were all alone in a vacuum instead of being complexly interrelated with all the rest of the linguistic structure.

In the present case, I simply can't make up my mind whether the problem that you're concerned with is a linguistic problem or a problem of stylistics. (Notice please that I didn't say "*only* a problem of stylistics".) And it seems to me that you ought not to leave the reader in doubt on such a crucial point. If the problem is in fact linguistic, its relevance to structural considerations of a larger sort should be obvious, and indeed should guide the discussion from start to finish; but there is nothing of the kind here. Instead, you discuss your problem as if structure did not exist, as if it were possible to solve each isolated question of grammar on its own merits without a thought for the consequences in related parts of the picture. It is symptomatic of your whole approach that the discussion in this article is wholly non-technical. It is fashionable to sneer at technical writing; but I believe that an article in a technical journal may reasonably be expected to make use of such technical terms as are current in the domain of the problem discussed. We haven't got very far yet in a rigorous treatment of grammatical constructions; but we've made a beginning — and there's no sign of it here.

I hope that these rambling ejaculations (that are little more) will make you understand just why it is that I think your article should not be published in LANGUAGE.

Sincerely yours,  
B. Bloch

"Linear Modification" was also a point of contact with Al Marckwardt, a great friend of linguistics in the more powerful circles of English teaching. Marckwardt wrote the favorable report that got the article published in *PMLA*. We had already exchanged a few letters, starting in 1940, on various matters — English usage, language teaching, and word coinage.

And that same article was a tie with someone else who eventually gravitated to Indiana, though at the time she was at Johns Hopkins: Anna Hatcher. She wrote about twenty pages of comments on "Linear Modification", and the rewriting I did benefited most of all from her criticism. We started corresponding in 1948 and I have always found everything she has written full of style and grace and good linguistic sense, whether in her monographs or in her letters. All her life she has written good linguistics without finding it necessary

to join any of the sprees of bandwagon-jumping that are the delight of so many scholarly revelers. [Anna Hatcher died in 1978.]

My first meeting with Kenneth Pike was when he invited my wife and me to his place — a property belonging to his wife's parents, I think — in Santa Ana, California, in 1948. He must have been pausing for breath between one foreign assignment and another. A little family incident that he related will illustrate his single-minded linguisticity. His wife had gone out leaving him in charge of the children, while he kept on working at his desk. All of a sudden he remembered that he was supposed to be responsible for them and he wondered where the youngest one was. Then he realized that she was sitting on his lap. On another occasion he dropped in on us in Los Angeles with a handsome camera and took a picture of our infant daughter. I admired the camera, and I guess I must have asked him how much it cost, because his answer was that when he needed something like that in his work he prayed for it. Those who have been on Ken Pike's mailing list know that he is an ordained minister who has authored several devotional works as well as his list of books and articles on linguistics. In appearance too there has always been something Christlike about him. That makes it a little hard to explain the strain of mischief that crops up now and then. In Texas in 1958 I was to meet him at the train station, which I did, only he turned up wearing a pair of trick glasses that made one of his eyes appear to be protruding from its socket against a background of iridescent whorls. I didn't feel that I knew him well enough to decide whether this was a joke or an aberration, so I kept quiet, which must have been very disappointing to him. Our correspondence was most frequent between 1949 and 1951, when he was engaged in a controversy with Hockett and I sent him one or two supporting arguments.

Another non-LSA organization through which I became acquainted with several LSA figures was the Linguistic Circle of New York, later renamed the International Linguistic Association, which publishes the journal *Word*. William Diver, Uriel Weinreich, André Martinet, and Morris Swadesh were those contacts. Swadesh I knew least of all, mainly through correspondence about mislaid articles when he was editor of *Word*. I wish I had known him better, for I think this country lost one of its finest representatives of the Sapir tradition when it hounded him out because of his politics. Lucky Mexico. Martinet too I knew only through correspondence, one topic of which was the Baskin translation of Saussure's *Cours*, which he asked me to criticize. Diver and Weinreich I knew both through their editorship of *Word* and through personal contact in 1956-57. Diver's distinguished air belied his rather dif-

fident manner. I have always had the impression, with him, of inner power on a tight rein. He is another non-joiner whose work has been neglected by the mainstream [though profoundly influential with his students, in the pursuit of form-content analysis]. Weinreich I began corresponding with in 1955, mostly about questions of stress which he was working on in Yiddish. When I visited him in 1956 I found him one of the gentlest and most unassuming persons I had ever met. He was another of the non-establishment linguists who rode out the structuralist period; fortunately he did get the attention he deserved in his work on semantics, though it was cut short all too soon. The New York group I think was cosmopolitan enough to avoid the provincialism that tinged establishment linguistics through the 40s and 50s. And perhaps still today.

The shock wave of transformational grammar hit me only weeks before I left California for Colorado in 1960, though it was to be another three years before I had the chance to meet and know some of its principal figures. I had missed the chance to get acquainted with Chomsky at the Texas conference in the spring of 1958 when I was working in Austin on the project that eventually became *Modern Spanish* (1960). With the move to Harvard in 1963 I was close enough to MIT to see Chomsky and Morris Halle occasionally, though not as often as would have been good for me. Roman Jakobson, whom I had missed before when he was in California, was an acquaintance that I have prized — which I suppose is a statement that a few hundred other budding linguists could make. A trait of mine that caused him the most mirth was my non-drinking habits, which he regarded as unbecoming in a linguist. I was absolutely floored with his conversation and his wit, which was never dulled even by the Russian syntax and phonology that it had to filter through. He is certainly first in the number of students he has influenced. [But as of 1988 the palm would go to Chomsky.]

As for Chomsky, I found him — as I guess most others have — a person with the greatest presence of mind, probably the most skilled advocate in our field. We are almost polar opposites in our approach. He would write an equation any day rather than a paragraph (though paragraphs have flowed from his pen), and my preferences are the reverse. He loves Theory with a capital *T* and wants evaluations conducive to the Best, with a capital *B*. I want theories, plural, with small *t*'s, and I think that the Best is enemy of the Good. He sees language as orderly *and* tightly organized. I see it as heterogeneous *but* tightly organized. Oddly enough, our respective viewpoints coincide when projected to politics. His rationalism would like to make human relationships reasonable. My sentimentality would like to make them humane. The two seem to come



out at the same place. In any case, I thoroughly approve of Chomsky's political avocation and I think that other scholars should not use their scholarship as a social copout. I'm not sure exactly what set Chomsky going in this direction, but the first sign of it that I was aware of came with the U.S. Marine invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, another of those Marine classics in Latin America. That was my own last fling at activism when I worked with a small group of Harvard graduates getting out a protest letter to about 3000 Spanish teachers across the country; but for Chomsky it was a natural step to organized and energetic opposition to U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia and imperialist politics in general, for which this country owes him a debt of gratitude. [So far from being paid in the late 80s that the mainstream press and other media have been completely closed off to him.] He took great risks, and did it courageously. Has any other linguist received the accolade of being put on the list of enemies of Richard Nixon?

There are other linguist friends of the Harvard days — Calvert Watkins, Karl Teeter, Susumu Kuno, Bruce Fraser, and more — but I will expand on only the ones I came to know best, Einar Haugen, George and Robin Lakoff, and John Robert Ross.

Haugen I could have known thirty years earlier when he was just beginning his career at the University of Wisconsin, but I never met him, though I knew of his work through a fellow student who was an admirer of his. I exchanged a letter or two with him before he came to Harvard, but it was not till then that I came to know him and to appreciate the depth of his scholarship and the breadth of his contribution to every aspect of our field. He referred to himself as “the small-town boy from the Midwest”, but he is among the most cosmopolitan linguists we have. His influence is at its peak right now with the world-weariness that some formalists are feeling and the turn toward socio-linguistics, which is the direction toward which his work in bilingualism has always pointed. We were neighbors in Boylston Hall at Harvard and also in the same suburb of Boston. A great personal quality is his thoughtfulness as a host, taking pains to learn of a guest's interests and preferences. When he learned that I was going to be at the Center for Advanced Study at Stanford in 1969, he invited my wife and me to his house where he gave us a preview, with his slide projector, of life there. As with the Malkiels and Henry and Renée Kahane, he and his wife are one of those teams of mutual enrichment, in both their intellectual and domestic life.

George Lakoff and Haj Ross I met at the same time, I think in 1965. I struck up a correspondence with George immediately, but was not in direct

contact with him till a year later, when I started attending lectures of his regularly and continued for a semester. Ross was also a regular presence at those lectures, which were on English syntax. It was a kind of duet. George was the lead voice, but Haj harmonized at intervals in a lively exchange that kept the class on its toes with everyone participating to some extent. One had the feeling of grammar in the making, as if we were out exploring a freshly turned field, with everyone retrieving specimens before the bulldozers moved in. Quite the opposite of the set-lecture kind of presentation that older teachers like me had been used to, and equally different from the choreographed participation in a language class. It called for fast thinking on one's feet, at which Lakoff was adept. At that time he was still well inside the Chomsky 1965 paradigm, but he was already too intellectually restless to stay there long. It might have been a year or two later, when I met him going up or down an elevator in Holyoke Center, that he asked if I didn't think that it would be feasible to look at language as a manifestation of natural logic. I'm afraid I didn't find the concept clear at the time, but he has made it so since, in the breakaway into generative semantics [and more recently in his studies of prototypes and metaphor]. Meanwhile of course Robin Lakoff has achieved independent fame as a critic and sociolinguist, with some of the best-balanced work on the role of sex in language. [And latest of all an assessment of generative semantics and its effects on a field that pretends to have passed it by.]

Ross is like a lovable bear who has found a cache of honey in a hollow part of the language tree and is continually astonished at the wonder of it. He digs up ever more interesting stuff, and of late has been demonstrating in pretty conclusive ways that shades of difference and not mere difference require a place in our analyses. In the lecture hall he handles himself as well as Lakoff though the pace is a little more relaxed.

This brings me to the last episode, which is the 1972 presidency of the Society. The constitution had provided for a write-in ballot, but I think it had never been used before in the case of a presidential candidate. The choice of the Nominating Committee was Martin Joos. This was perfectly natural, given the tradition of seeing the office of president as a recognition of scholarship and of service in the Society. The members of the Committee felt that this was an honor long overdue to Martin Joos, and that was true. But there were objections, especially from a good many of the younger members of the Society who felt that someone outspokenly identified with the Old Guard was not the right choice, and two of them approached me to ask if I would be willing to have my

name put in as an alternative. I consented, I guess because I could think of myself as having a neutral enough shade to be acceptable to both sides, as long as it appeared that there was going to be a contest one way or another. Since we can't compare non-events with events there is no way of telling whether my acceptance averted worse trouble, but at least nothing terribly upsetting happened. The only controversies in 1972 involved issues that had nothing to do with the officialdom of the Society. With possibly one exception, at the end of the term. After turning the question over in my mind for a long time, I decided to use a public-interest matter as the topic of my presidential talk, and called it "Truth Is a Linguistic Question" (1973). There was no way to avoid a certain popularizing tone and that seems to have offended a few of those who heard the talk or read it afterwards and who opposed its publication in the usual forum of *Language*. I think I might have assuaged their feelings by choosing my examples from the political slogans of Ancient Rome and the deceptions of Venetian traders in the Levant. But with the most fragrant examples in history being generated under our noses, I opted for topicality. Worse still, I find myself unrepentant. On a pygmy scale, I was Dwight Eisenhower warning against the Military-Industrial-Scientific Complex.

1974

## II. *Self-Notes*

Some personal details. Like many other linguists and would-be linguists of my generation, I came to language through literature. In my undergraduate days it was close to a toss-up between mathematics, music, and Spanish which way I would go. But I soon lost interest in math and I didn't have the means to continue in music, so Spanish was *it*, as much by default as anything else. Of course, given the nature of college studies at that time, Spanish meant Spanish literature for the most part — though actually I was attracted more by the language. My only taste of anything approaching linguistics was in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, where I had the luck to be one of a small group of students working under Antonio G. Solalinde on his editing of medieval texts and assembling of citations for the medieval Spanish dictionary. My prime interest in linguistics has always been the lexicon. This started in college when I began putting together my own home-made dictionary of synonyms. I had the illusion that one could master one's own language to the point of always making exactly the right choice of word, and I was continually frustrated by the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon. But I was that kind

of scatterbrain who goes to an encyclopedia for the date of El Greco's birth and is so fascinated by the account of Greek sculpture on the page opposite that he forgets what he was looking for. I was soon away and running after the words themselves. The experience with Solalinde strengthened this absorption, which has continued ever since, as I think some of my recent stuff shows where I refuse to accept the concept of transformationally-introduced particles or any other such denial of lexical meaning to words.

After graduate school I was still headed in a literary direction but more and more divided in my affections. My dissertation was on the Spanish novelist Pío Baroja; he was a dabbler in philosophy, which led me to pick that field as my doctoral minor. I was still seeking an outlet for my interest in words, and I found it, partially, in a little publication that was being put out by an English teacher in Los Angeles, Omar Colodny, a colorful figure who had made and lost a fortune in California real estate. He called his publication *Words*, and in it he published the thoughts of a number of word-fanciers besides himself, including Jerome Hixson of DePauw and one of the most dedicated collectors of lexicography, Peter Tamony of San Francisco, a man without academic connections who spent much of his life garnering slang for the love of it. The past eight years or so he has been putting out a little dittoed bulletin that he calls *Americanisms* but his first contributions that I read were in *Words*. [Tamony's fame had barely begun to spread when his life was cut short in 1985. His gleanings of usage — 70 or 80 items a day recorded — are now a part of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri, which has established a lectureship in his honor, with Allen Walker Read (see below) its first speaker, in 1987 (see McLain 1980).] My own production for *Words* was on points of usage and grammatical trivia, but Colodny allowed me to start a regular department called "The Living Language", where I recorded new words and expressions as I ran across them. This also put me in touch with Henry L. Mencken, in 1936, and I corresponded with him occasionally till his illness in 1948. He was of course the dean of nonacademic writing about language, and he gave me a lot of encouragement. I moved my "Living Language" department to *American Speech*, renaming it "Among the New Words", and kept it going there for a few years till it was taken over by Willis Russell [who had it till his death in 1985. It was restarted in 1987 by John Algeo with initial collaboration by Mary Gray Porter.] Russell is one of the links between LSA and the American Dialect Society. One other link I must mention here is Allen Walker Read, who taught me that something more than inspiration and intuition is needed to write a scholarly article. Read of course is

our authority on the comparison of British and American English [and is currently — 1988 — collaborating with John Algeo on a definitive work (see Algeo 1988)]. I met him in 1943 in New Haven when he was in uniform, and we climbed West Rock for a picnic. [Together with his wife Charlotte, who has served the Institute of General Semantics for many years, Read is one of the nucleus of American linguists who support the theories of the linguist-philosopher Alfred Korzybski, who taught that linguistic habits are a major factor in human health and sanity.]

That pursues the neologism thread about as far as it goes. Looking back again at the start of it, I was divided as I said between language and literature, and the New Words episode was an expression of my interest in language. But what clinched it for language over literature was the first few years of teaching. I taught first at a junior college and then at a four-year college where most of the working hours had to be spent teaching undergraduates to pronounce and conjugate, with practically no time for highbrow interests. It wasn't long before I found myself looking for better ways of dealing with what we call contrast grammar nowadays. I got the idea that it ought to be possible to find manifestations in English of things that Spanish teachers had been treating as uniquely Spanish — a primitive notion of universals that prompted several studies in which I actually did hit upon parallels that were well motivated both formally and semantically. The first was the question of word order, especially the position taken by the adjective in Romance languages. I set up a parallel with English adverb position, a first glimmering of what became "Linear Modification" a decade later. More recently two other parallels turned up. One was the covert categories (as Benjamin Lee Whorf called them) of essence and accident, which English turns out to have, paralleling Spanish *ser* and *estar*, but in some very odd places. The other ties in with the Romance subjunctive, and is an illocutionary distinction that can be directly related to the order of cognitive verbs in English (*know*, *think*, *say*, *regret*, *suppose*; see Bolinger 1990). I mention these just as an illustration of the linguistic serendipity of a determined search for classroom gimmicks.

My first inkling that linguistics was my dish was around 1938 or 1939 when I ran across an article by Kenneth Pike. It was an inspiration to make language an object of serious study instead of dabbling. But the first real break was in the spring of 1943, when Yale University advertised its Sterling Fellowships. I decided to apply, and addressed myself to finding a topic that I thought might dazzle the judges and at the same time would be worth working on. There was my interest in music, and in language there was intonation,

largely unexplored. So I composed my piece and cycled off with it, losing it on the way to the post office (my wife retraced my pedaling with hers and spotted the envelope curbside — I was ready to call the whole thing off). Somebody must have liked what I wrote, because a couple of months later a small note came saying laconically that I had one of the fellowships. I'll have to add that this was wartime and most of the promising younger linguists were in uniform. I am sure that I benefited from the scarcity of applicants.

In early summer of 1943 I was off to New Haven with my wife and seven-year-old son. The fellowship left me free to do my research in my own way. In my case this was not an advantage because it did not force me into association with the great teachers at Yale, who of course at that time included Bloomfield, Bloch, and Trager. What I needed most was a start on a linguistic education, and instead I was spending most of my time in the library. It wasn't the fault of the people in linguistics because I'm sure they would have preferred to keep some control over the fellowship. I well remember my first visit to Bloch's office. Later he was a rare friend, but at that moment, with wisps of Kansas straw protruding from behind my ears, I could tell from the look on his face that he held out little hope for my future. Bloomfield later tried to encourage me to take more part in the activities there, but there was little he could do. Most of the linguists at that time were being pestered by the government in connection with the Army Specialized Training Program and other wartime exercises. I recall a long-distance call from Washington that kept Bloomfield on the telephone, and his impatient remark afterward that he couldn't understand Washington's penchant for using the telephone for every trivial question, that could just as well be taken care of by letter. Whatever the reasons, and my recollections are not very clear at this point, I went my own way, and while that I think may have helped to keep me uncommitted to 1940 structuralism, it meant that I missed some opportunities. I made a beginning in my work on prosody, started an article or two that later worked themselves into adumbrations of the notion of pitch accent, but left New Haven in the spring of 1944 with no better preparation in linguistics that I had when I arrived. But I knew better what I didn't know, and joined LSA as one way of catching up through reading.

My next move took me even farther from the center of things. I joined the Spanish Department at the University of Southern California and my new job required concentration on language teaching again for several years. It was the time of the GI deluge after the war, and I was busy enrolling students and organizing classes. In a couple of years I became department head and re-

mained so for thirteen years. At first there was no time for linguistic interests but later the work tapered off and I began to look at intonation again. There had been a good deal published in the meantime, including Pike's book on American English Intonation (1945), which set the American structuralists off on what I thought was a wild-goose chase, in search of phonemic levels as a basis for analyzing intonation. Pike was not especially dogmatic about this, and his book was — and is — a rich source of down-to-earth discussion about intonation *patterns*. But his followers disregarded most of that part of his work and concentrated on the part that seemed to me to be theoretically wrong. Eventually I got my view into print, with the help of Fred Householder who analyzed a set of sound spectrograms of a psychophysical test that I gave to try to prove that intonation *configurations* are what count, and not pitch phonemes. That article — “Intonation: Levels Versus Configurations” (1951) — caught the attention of Pierre Delattre and Frank Cooper at Haskins Laboratories, and led to the second break, a research fellowship at Haskins that gave me a year to work on questions of pitch and stress. A series of papers on stress, juncture, and pitch accent were the result. I think that this is what finally gave me some recognition as a linguist. The main thing was the proof of the hegemony of pitch in most prosodic contrasts, especially the phenomenon that I called ‘pitch obtusion’, which was the physical manifestation of pitch accent. (The idea had always been that if there was pitch marking, the pitch had to go *up*.) That conclusion I think still stands, though my ideas on pitch *accents* — plural — need revision.

Meanwhile the teaching job was as demanding as ever, and Sputnik hit the language-teaching profession like a misguided missile. The U.S. was losing its lead. The National Defense Education Act was set up to get things moving in science, mathematics, and foreign language. Bill Parker, Director of the Foreign Language Program at the Modern Language Association, asked me to head up a committee to write a textbook that would break away from some of the anti-linguistic traditions that kept repeating themselves in one book after another. The idea of the the project was to put the pressure on publishers by producing a text that would be officially sponsored by the Association but let out for bids by commercial publishers — in hopes that competition would then force other publishers to follow. The scheme was fairly successful and the resulting text, *Modern Spanish*, was an important part of the audiolingual revolution — what was unjustifiably called by some people at that time the ‘linguistic method’.

*Modern Spanish* appeared in 1960. As part of the job of introducing audiolingual teaching at USC I had already been giving a good part of my time to visiting classes and criticizing the performance of our teaching assistants. This — coupled with the fact that Pierre Delattre had moved to Colorado — led to my serving as visiting linguist at Boulder for the first NDEA Institute in 1959, and going to Boulder on a full-time teaching appointment the next year. This was my introduction to one or two courses of straight linguistics, besides those in Spanish linguistics and the regular assignment of applied linguistics for language teachers. But it lasted only three years. The political climate was not to my liking and I was ready enough to go to Harvard when the chance came in 1963. There I was to do my last ten years of teaching, with about half of my duties still in the training program for graduate students — teaching applied linguistics and visiting classes. But there was more leisure for my research, which was turning more and more toward general linguistics and the semantics of English. It was also getting me in touch with younger scholars by correspondence. What I had not enjoyed through personal contact I was now getting through the mail, and it has been the most rewarding part of what I have done in the decade since 1964. The pattern at Yale had repeated itself and I was pretty much a loner — or at least a non-joiner — all through those years. But being on the sidelines had turned me into something of a critic and this tendency grew. It also left me unattached to current dogmas, and when some of those who *had* been attached became disillusioned they seem to have found some of my earlier critiques congenial to their own thinking. My fault has been not being able to see the woods for the trees. But when you live in a time of theoreticians who are unable to see the trees for the woods, then maybe you serve a purpose, if only as ballast on the other end of the see-saw.

So here I am, at 66 and retired, with a lot to do and an uncertain place in my field. Somebody said a few years ago that my chief contribution to linguistics was that of generating an inexhaustible supply of minimal pairs — that would make me a kind of sorcerer's apprentice of the counterexample. I prefer to think of myself as the Mary Garden of linguistics. Mary Garden was a soprano with the Chicago Opera two generations ago, who had a certain reputation, but it was mostly flair. What she didn't have was a voice.

I'll re-use the musical analogy for a final remark. I was not born to be a linguist. I was born to write music, and somewhere along the line I got mislaid. A composer draws his raw material from some internal well. That's what I've done with language, in trying to test the limits with a kaleidoscope of examples. It's almost as much fun as making up a tune and harmonizing it.



1988

It is hard to make a story of retirement years anything but anticlimactic, whether in the living or in the telling. From a distance the December hills of California look golden, but up close they are covered with straw. The only excitement comes when, by accident or arson, they are set afire.

I left teaching in 1973 and retreated to a prepared position in Palo Alto, hoping to keep up a university connection of sorts and to do something with the notes I had been accumulating. The first wish was generously answered by the Linguistics Department at Stanford, which arranged a non-paying appointment that enabled me to use the library and gave me access to Department affairs. Needless to say the proximity of Berkeley was a further attraction. Many of the linguists whose work I have most admired were either in the San Francisco area to begin with or had migrated there about the same time and were pursuing interests that I found congenial — the Lakoffs, Charles Fillmore, John Ohala, Wallace Chafe, William S-Y. Wang, Elizabeth Traugott. Charles Ferguson, Will Leben, and Joseph Greenberg were already at Stanford; I did not know their work well, though I tried to remedy that. Later comers were Thomas Wasow and Ivan Sag, who brought a stronger note of generativity to a scene of sociolinguistic and developmental research, which continues to flourish — especially since the appointment of John Rickford in 1980. Greenberg's universalism has spread so far beyond Stanford that I meet it coming back from other places, in particular from two scholars whom I scarcely knew in 1973, Talmy Givón at Oregon and John Haiman at Manitoba [as of September 1989: Macalester College, St. Paul, Minn.]. I missed knowing Givón earlier by a fluke. In his transformational beginnings when he was with the Lexicographic Project at Systems Development Corporation he had written a piece that somehow came into my hands, and I wrote a two- or three-page response, but did not mail it, hesitating for once to put my foot in a discussion. Seven years later I did post it, after reading something else of his that revealed his change of direction. As readers of his *On Understanding Grammar* (1979) are aware, he has been one of the most forthright critics of the transformational-generative 'paradigm'. As for Haiman, to him we are indebted for demonstrating the pervasively symbolic nature of language, its utilization of every contrast in form to convey *something*, at whatever level, often seemingly in spite of its users. Greenberg and his followers have not stopped

at theoretical constructs. They have revived comparative linguistics with hard work in language after language.

The Berkeley side could be characterized as less comparative and more philosophical. Robin and George Lakoff were pioneers of generative semantics, that supposedly failed school that nevertheless enriched us immeasurably. George has taken up the cause of metaphor and the theory of prototypes transferred from psychology. John Ohala has looked at associations of language and gesture. Charles Fillmore is best known for developing the theory of case grammar. A common thread in most of the original work in California has been the ever-growing preeminence of meaning as a necessary concomitant of every serious discussion of language — quite different in spirit from the notion that forms are independent enough to be studied by themselves, inherited by the transformationalists from their structuralist predecessors of the 1940s. Mary Key at Irvine, with a well-earned reputation as an authority on paralanguage, has turned to a broad-scale comparison of word forms and meanings across languages as evidence for a common origin; Mary LeCron Foster at Berkeley has been doing the same, independently. (The new respectability of this line of study was certified in 1985 with the 'first scientific meeting' of the Language Origins Society in Cracow.) The linguists — departmentally or interdepartmentally — at Santa Barbara, USC in Los Angeles, and San Diego have equally promoted the trend — Sandra Thompson, Charles Li, Robert Hetzron, Larry Hyman, and especially Ronald Langacker with his Space Grammar re-named Cognitive Grammar to avoid astral associations. UCLA you might say is the main holdout, the Western bastion of formalism, with the closest ties to MIT. (But with at least one dissenter, the able historicist Raimo Anttila.)

The stature of these scholars requires no boost from me, and I name them only to identify my professional contacts over the past fourteen years. My journeys to conferences have been few, and I have drawn most inspiration from those nearby. The chief disrupter of my lingering beside the hearth was the founding of a new society in 1974, the Linguistic Association of the U.S. and Canada, or LACUS. A number of scholars, who felt that their views were not being adequately represented by the existing associations and their journals, decided to step outside the 'establishment' — especially as then embodied in the transformational-generative movement — and set up their own shop. LACUS did me the honor of making me its first president, but credit for its success goes above all to two of its founding members, Adam Makkai and Valerie Becker Makkai, who have tirelessly supervised the running of the organization and its series of annual publications, the *LACUS Forum* and the

affiliated journal *Forum Linguisticum*. LACUS attracted both older and younger scholars — the former including several noted structuralists who had made their reputation before transformational grammar appeared on the scene, the latter a number of probers in sociolinguistic fields such as discourse analysis — having in common the fact that their specialties were being neglected. The bonus, for me, was the relationship fostered with the Makkais, the etymologist J. Peter Maher, the authority on sexism in language Julia Penelope, and others, plus the congenial and uncrowded annual meetings.

Aside from this deviation, my contacts, even in California, have been less in person than by correspondence. Sometimes this has been in answer to questions directly put. More often it has been a response to some 'comments appreciated' invitation heading a manuscript or preprint. Thus irresistibly tempted, I have put in my two cents' worth with serene impartiality as to whether they were welcome or not. At one time or another I have exchanged letters with half of the linguists of my generation and others besides.

A healthy correspondence leads down many avenues. One is that of epistolary friendships never consummated in person but long cultivated. During the early period an example was Peter Erades, whose regular question-and-answer series in *English Studies* I knew from 1950 to 1962. His revision of Kruisinga (1953) puts him alongside H. Poutsma (1914-29) at the forefront of those Dutch scholars who ranked with that other foreigner Otto Jespersen in outshining all the native analysts of English until Quirk and others took the lead in 1972 and secured it for the foreseeable future in 1985.

A later epistolary friendship has been with Ivan Fónagy, this time through a mutual interest in prosody and the great problem of iconism-conventionalization-arbitrariness. Fónagy's artistry and rare literary and musical gifts afford him a perspective that few others have.

In one case my correspondents stand out as a group. Over the years, and quite informally, there has developed a relationship similar to that between Erades and the readers of *English Studies*. It started in 1952 when Isamu Abe was an exchange student at the University of Texas, and wrote to me about a question of intonation. We exchanged letters and our acquaintance grew to the point that some years later, after he joined the Tokyo Institute of Technology, he co-edited my book *Forms of English* (1965). English students in Japan began to send me questions and the correspondence grew. Abe has contributed some of the best work on English intonation and prosody in general.

More directly, but still mainly by letter, I have benefited from contacts with linguists in Britain. The friendship of longest standing is with Angus McIntosh

at the University of Edinburgh. In 1949 he visited the Summer Institute of Linguistics (whose most noted figure is Kenneth Pike) at its meeting in Norman, Oklahoma, and at the end of the session hitched a ride with William Bull who was on his way to start his new job at UCLA. On arriving in Los Angeles the two came to visit me and my family. I recall a backyard discussion of the inappropriateness of giving a delightful fruit such a name as Boysenberry. In 1954 we began a fairly steady correspondence, two years after he started working on Middle English dialects, a project that culminated, in 1986, in his monumental *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* — a perseverance that puts to shame my flitting from flower to flower. Which is not to say that he has neglected other linguistic interests; in 1987-88 he became involved in the publishing plans for a ten-volume encyclopedia of linguistics.

Of more recent, but still respectably elderly, date — 1961 — is my correspondence with Sir Randolph Quirk, then Professor of English at University College London and now the foremost authority on English usage. I met him in 1962 at the Ninth International Congress of Linguists in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and later was privileged to serve as informal critic for the 1972 volume mentioned above. In point of quantity and variety of topics, my letters to and from RQ outrank all but two or three others.

Our shared interest in intonation has brought exchanges with David Crystal (Reading) and Alan Cruttenden (Manchester); my recent contacts with intonologists have been closest with Cruttenden, who brings an expertise in child language to bear on how and why speech tunes develop. I should qualify this by naming D. Robert Ladd, Jr., Scottish by adoption (Edinburgh), whose studies on prosody I have learned from since his student days at Cornell. Ladd introduced me to the work of Carlos Gussenhoven (Nijmegen), whose fine-tuned ear for contrasts in tone is the living refutation of the belief that only native speakers can discriminate the more delicate shades of intonation. His comparisons of English and his native Dutch show the impressive range of similarities that almost tempt one to say that the two languages share a single system. (This is my conclusion; he would probably not agree.) Equally acute is another Dutch linguist, Cornelia Keijsper, whose theory of 'not not' (an accent on a word is a way of countering nullity) is a tidy way of accounting for accentual prominence (see Gussenhoven et al. 1987).

Meanwhile I have not lost touch with the Old Guard in the United States. The two who have most resolutely stood their ground against the tide of formalism are Robert A. Hall, Jr., and Charles Hockett, both of Cornell. Hall's bite is in his pen — personally his unoffending manner belies his picture of himself

as a 'stormy petrel' of linguistics. The fight that first brought him prominence was against the pop grammarians, whom he slaughtered in 1950 with his *Leave Your Language Alone*. (New generations of popsters have risen since.) Of late both Hall (1987) and Hockett (1987) — but particularly Hockett — have looked back with disaffection at the generative revolution. It is hard to forgive an approach that looks upon you not as an adversary but as an antiquity. Pike was similarly passed by, but Pike had his own troops in the Summer Institute of Linguistics and his tagmemic theory still has plenty of adherents.

One other member of the Old Guard who has borne up well is Archibald A. Hill. He has rolled with the punches, taken the changes philosophically. Not only as linguist but also as mentor he deserves a high place: without his material support and years of labor as Secretary-Treasurer, the Linguistic Society would not be what it is today.

Having come this far with appreciatory vignettes, anything I might add would seem to demote others to mere Honorable Mention. I can only say that I pay equal tribute to fifty-odd more, including such personal friends as C.-J. Bailey (for pioneering work in every aspect of sociolinguistics), Arthur Bronstein (for his organizational and lexicographic skills), Linda Waugh (for keeping the memory of Roman Jakobson alive and for bringing sense into the analysis of French), and Roger Wescott (for early and imaginative work on language origins and sound symbolism) — to incapsulate the alphabet by its two ends. It would take a page just to list all those of whose thoughts I have a substantial record in my files.

It remains to say something of myself in these latter days of life at the sidelines, on the shelf, in the twilight, or however one describes the state of amiable desuetude. I once pictured myself as forswearing linguistics when I reached this stage and embracing a new, and probably brief, life as a political activist. Alas, old habits have proved so strong, and the lure of the drawers of 4x6 cards so tempting, that I have stayed in orbit, producing one or two large pieces and a number of small ones, without much organization. I continue listening and collecting, informally, and now and then some load of cards will reach critical mass or some lively question of the day will light a fuse, and there is an excitation of smoke and flare that becomes an article. My collecting is heterogeneous. A few themes — usually involving some semantic contrast — have caught my attention (as like as not by accident), and I keep recording what I hear, mostly from radio broadcasts, overheard conversations, snips from newspapers and magazines, and lapses and other surprises that I am

guilty of myself. The emphasis is on the unexpected, not only because man-bites-dog is interesting but because in so doing he nibbles at the edge of the possible and tells us where the borders are. I catch myself saying *Who's crossing the street, [is it] Zak?* and wonder why I say *who* to refer to a cat. *Who* is for persons, isn't it? — and I had no intent to personify. Yet I could not have said *what* unless I had wondered not about the individual but about the species. This tells me that one attribute of *who*, in this instance outweighing the personal, is its individuality. Probably the grammatical literature records this somewhere, and if I ever do anything with it I'll certainly check, but for me, at the moment, it is a surprise. Or I hear someone say *Has Sally found a decent place to live in?* and wonder why it suggests to mind a cozy spot in a barn or cave. It then comes to me that *place* as an adverb (not, here, as a noun) borrows part of its sense from the verb — *Has she found a decent place to live?* would be living in the sense of making that one's home base; *I have no place to go* is I have no refuge, or perhaps I am aimless, whereas *go* to suggests some prior selection of a particular place, and *I have no place to sit on* looks for a definite spot such as a chair or stool whereas *no place to sit* is that I lack sitting accommodations in general — no place for my sitting. Or so it seems. Once on that scent, if I pursue it, there's no telling where or how far it will lead. Thirty pages' worth of discussion, surely.

There is something occult about that number thirty. It deserves study. Fewer than thirty leave what you are dealing with floating unattached to any of the surrounding peninsulas and archipelagoes that populate the seas of linguistic reality. More than thirty may help to drive the ship home but are redundant otherwise. I suspect that the number correlates with the length of the average book of Holy Writ.

The spirit of this wacky collecting can be captured by an item taken down just hours ago. It was on local radio — a rich source of contemporary usage because it offers the more or less standard accents of announcers and guests and also the untutored responses of listeners who call in. The speaker in this case was a commentator on the Philippine scene who got carried away by his topic. He was describing the treatment of Philippine political dissidents who under Marcos were imprisoned and occasionally therefore able to tell about it afterwards, but now *they're beir:g summarily exeCuted — EXeCuted — by the military*. Realizing that he was 'mispronouncing' *executed* he tried to correct himself, but still could not resist putting a climactic accent on the last full syllable of the verb.

Examples of this kind, relating to prosody, have been the subject of my most diligent listening in the past few years. I have had to adjust my camera to a tighter focus, and prosody was the natural thing to pursue. I had a statement to make: that intonation is not properly in the domain of segmental phonology, for all that duly trained linguists have struggled to put it there, nor even in the domain of linguistics as usually understood, though its interactions with syntax are so close that one could be excused for confusing the two. Rather it belongs with other manifestations of *affect* and its home is with gesture. A person who *inquires* is *inquisitive*, and the respondent aims as much to satisfy that mood as to generate a grammatical answer to a set of grammatical conditions. (In fact, the two may work separately and even at cross purposes — I can ‘ask’ a question knowing fully what to expect, or throw out a ‘statement’ on tenterhooks for confirmation.)

Partly my absorption in prosody has been an escape from formalism. Here was a realm where one could still go adventuring and find things that had not already been trampled to death by dozens of prospectors, surveyors, and developers with their rules, property rights, and legal jargon. After learning two or three formalisms and satisfying myself that they did not represent the reality of language as I understood it, I gave up, and limited myself to patrolling the borders where I could still pick up a bit of acreage at a low rate and annoy the formalists when they tried to annex it. That is no way to revolutionize a science, so whatever my contribution may have been, I picture it as not that of the urban insider but that of a stubborn farmer with his feet on the ground.

At this point one is expected to change hats. The autobiographer is supposed to turn prophet. What do I see for the future of the discipline that I have teased and tampered with for the better part of a lifetime?

In the broadest perspective — as I intimated earlier — I see *meaning* in the ascendant, a turnabout from the preoccupations of structuralism, which ignored meaning, and its natural successors, which relegated meaning to a ‘semantic component’ and left it there as an untouchable sacred flame. The day of generative semantics may have passed, but its stirrings are not with us only in the enthusiasm with which studies of iconicity and metaphor are being pursued, and not only down such important side paths as child language and comparisons based on universal conceptualizations, but in new, meaning-based and fully articulated theories such as cognitive grammar. Meaning is seen as the igniter, animator, and shaper of all linguistic activity, not as a confined system of truth-value redundancies. (How things were a few years

ago is illustrated by the response I got from a truth-value friend when I listed semantics among my then current pursuits: "I didn't know you were interested in semantics!"

Take an example. In a study of child language, Clark & Carpenter (1989) identify 'emergent categories' based on "the initial concepts that children build on as they select grammatical devices to encode their meanings" (p.24). Starting with a concept of 'source', children who learn the preposition *from* in its concrete senses will apply it to areas of figurative 'fromness' such as agency (*The dog was patted from the little girl*, p.18), cause (*Birds are scared from big cats*, *ibid.*), possession (*That's a finger from him*, p.8), etc. As forces like this carry on past childhood they tend to reshape fossils to make them more transparently meaningful: *within ten miles from home*, for example, replacing the older *within ten miles of home*. Many such expressions containing the almost purely relational *of* are discarding that preposition in favor of more graphic ones: *for* (*advocacy for*), *about* (*We can make almost no sense about it*), *over* (*My mother is very protective over me*), etc. Analyses of meaning, of how ambiguities are resolved and messages are grasped, are becoming as explicit and detailed as anything in autonomous syntax, and 'lists' of meaning-bearing elements, including multi-word ones, are once more a respectable object of study. Even taxonomies can be practiced by linguists without fear of disgrace.

No doubt the wheel will turn again. It always does. But while we are at the top we might as well enjoy the view.

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\* For a complete list of the author's writings from 1934 till 1988, see "Bibliography of Dwight Bolinger" in Bolinger (1990:365-384).



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