Greetings, or, getting to know me

This issue is the first issue of the rest of my editorship! Such a statement may appear to be a rather flippant way of introducing myself as I take over the reins of this august journal but, playing, as it does, off the catch-phrase from the 1960s and early 1970s, 'Today is the first day of the rest of your life', it serves both to locate me in time and space (I came of age in the sixties as a person and in the seventies as a linguist) and to convey a sense, I hope, of the excitement I feel as I assume this awesome responsibility.

I use *awesome* here in something close to its etymological sense of 'inspiring reverence and wonder'—though without the sense of 'dread' that some of its cognate forms might suggest (Old Norse *agi* 'frightened', Greek ἄχος 'distress, pain', from a Proto-Indo-European root *agh- 'be afraid')—but at the same time as well in its more recent (though not necessarily still current) slang sense of 'cool, neat, exciting'.

These comments signal my interest in language change and language history, for they not only provide etymological information but also reflect the recognition that words can change in meaning and use over time and in some social settings a form might enjoy a use different from that found in others. Indeed, I see myself primarily as a historical linguist, and certainly most of my research and teaching over my twenty-two years at The Ohio State University has involved aspects of language history, language change, and language relatedness in some way or another, mainly with regard to the Indo-European languages and especially with regard to Greek. My interests, however, do not signal a return to a period in the history of the journal—and the field—where historical linguistics clearly dominated and to some extent defined the field (as a look at the tables of contents for early issues of *Language* would reveal).

Rather, for me, a good historical linguist must be a good linguist in general, ready to examine any aspect of a language, for (at least) two reasons. First, since all the various components of a language can change, one must be prepared to investigate and try to understand the nature of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and so on. Second, whatever we learn about these areas will give insights into language synchronically, and I believe firmly that to understand how language changes—how a language passes over time from one synchronic state to another and another and another—we have to be able to characterize what those synchronic states look like and what features, categories, and constructs they contain. Moreover, since change is embedded in the social history and practices of the speakers/users of a language and is fed in part by aspects of language acquisition, both first and second, and by the contacts speakers/users have with others, sociolinguistics especially but also psycholinguistics must be seen as crucial to a full understanding of historical linguistics. For all these reasons, I have always considered it critical to keep up, as much as I can, with everything that is going on in our field in general, thus taking 'linguistics' in the broadest sense possible.

I trust that this breadth will serve me well in my capacity as editor, since *Language* is a journal of linguistics in general, not of any particular subfield or any particular theoretical approach. It is open to—and should be of interest to—linguists of all persuasions, all subareas, and all theoretical stripes.

In fact, in making my decisions about what to publish here, quality, pure and simple, will be one of my key guiding lights, along with the admittedly elusive criterion of being

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'of interest to professional linguists' (to quote from the Information for Contributors on the inside back cover). This has always been the practice of my predecessors in this role and I see no reason to deviate from this course. It is true, though, that there is room for discussion about what constitutes 'interest to professional linguists', and I intend to address that very issue in subsequent columns, so watch this space! In any case, all contributors can rest assured that there are no quotas, no favored areas, and no aiming for any particular type of representation in the pages of *Language*.

Readers may wonder what plans, if any, I have for changes in the nature of the journal, and at this point (though I will return to this matter in later columns), let me mention one idea that has occurred to me: I would like to see the publication of letters in *Language*, for they are a recognized way (certainly so in other disciplines) for ideas and claims to be discussed in a scholarly way. In a sense, a good letter is like a mini-paper or a squib (or can be, that is). I therefore urge readers to get out their pens, fire up their computers, and send me short, pithy, and well-crafted letters addressing some aspect of the field they want to bring to the attention of other readers; based on what I get, I will consider creating a section in the journal for such correspondence.

To return to an earlier theme, as *Language* has now passed the milestone of more than seventy-five years of publication, my task as editor is awesome also because of the tradition behind the journal and behind the Linguistic Society of America as symbols of our field.

On a more personal note, this transition is awesome as well for me here at Ohio State, since it connects me with the early days of the journal and the LSA in ways I am only now beginning to fully appreciate. The call for the creation of a 'Linguistic Society' was issued by Leonard Bloomfield on November 15, 1924 when he was an assistant professor in the German Department here at Ohio State; it is published in full on pages 6–7 of the first issue of the journal (1925), and especially together with his paper—the first published in *Language* (vol. 1. 1–5)—entitled 'Why a linguistic society?', makes a compelling case for the autonomy of our field from other existing disciplines. Among the twenty-eight scholars joining Bloomfield in this call (some quite distinguished and recognizable as such to many even today, for example Franz Boas, Carl D. Buck, Alfred Kroeber, Edward Sapir, Edgar Sturtevant, *inter alios*) was George Melville Bolling of the Classics Department here at Ohio State. Bolling went on to become the first editor of *Language*. My university therefore figured prominently in the emergence of *Language* as the premier journal in our field. I hope to find out more about this history from Ohio State's archives (assuming that documentation exists and is recoverable), and will share it in this column.

Clearly, my work is cut out for me and numerous tasks face me—not the least of which is making good on my promises of material to cover in this column in coming issues! Naturally, I hope to live up to the high standards that have been set by previous editors and thus will do everything in my power to continue to keep *Language* at the forefront of linguistics. I look forward to and welcome these challenges.

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