THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

Recognizing a *Language* great

Over the years, in these columns, I have regularly commented on matters of editorial policy and on details of the history of the journal, and occasionally have added my thoughts on the field. Once in a while too my thoughts have fallen upon some aspect of the content of a given issue. Circumstances dictate that I take this last approach in this quarter's offering.

With this issue, *Language* formally and with great sadness acknowledges the passing of a giant in our field who played a key role in the development and history of the journal, just as he did with the development and history of our field. I speak, of course, of Bill Bright, third editor of the journal (from 1966 to 1987), president of the LSA (1989), and a key figure in American Indian linguistics, South Asian linguistics, and general sociolinguistics over a fifty-five-year period.

Bill passed away on October 15 of last year, and while *Language* cannot recognize every linguist who passes away, not even every major linguist, clearly he is someone who deserves all the recognition *Language* can muster.[1] Accordingly, in this issue, we include an obituary on Bill written by his former student and long-time friend Jane Hill (see pages 628–641). In addition, this issue is formally dedicated to his memory, an honor bestowed only relatively rarely in the history of the journal.[2] And in this column I offer some reflections on Bill Bright as an editor of this journal.

Bill was innovative in his shaping of *Language*, and many features no doubt taken for granted by many readers in recent years are the result of his actions. For instance, he reinstituted the practice of having an abstract with each article, thereby serving well the needs of readers to learn quickly what a paper is about and also obliging authors to attempt to state succinctly what their main point is.[3] He also created the Editor's Department (a feature, I confess, that I have taken rather considerable advantage of), deciding that it would, as he put it in the very first one in December 1981, 'replace the sporadic ''Notes'', of various editorial content, which [had] previously appeared in [that] space' (*Language* 57.4.981–82). I am pleased to be continuing his legacy and note particularly that he envisioned there being an Editor's Department 'in each issue', a goal I have striven to fulfill.

One other innovation of Bill's was the book notice, the history of which I intend to review in greater detail in the next issue but which can be noted briefly here as dating from March of 1977, with the first one appearing in *Language* 53.1. Bill authored numerous book notices himself over the years, including all twenty in that first issue (spanning pages 257–265). It is thus quite fitting that we publish in this issue, along

[1] My Editor's Department ('With all due respect . . .') in the March 2004 issue (*Language* 80.1.4–6) has some general discussion on obituaries in the journal, and in my annual report of that year I discuss the journal's obituary policy (80.2.369).

[2] Most recently, the March 2007 issue (*Language* 83.1) honored the memory of Peter Ladefoged in this way. My Editor's Department in that issue ('Paying tribute', pp. 5–7) listed fourteen times prior to that issue that a single number or a whole volume was dedicated to particularly noteworthy individuals in the linguistics community (two of which were posthumous recognitions); although that list was intended to be exhaustive, it has come to my attention that one dedicated volume was omitted (*Language* 60 (1984), dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Edward's Sapir's birth)—see the correction in this issue (p. 492) for full details.

[3] See 'Notes', in *Language* 43.1.379 (1967); I thank my assistant Helena Riha for finding for me all of Bill's early 'Notes' and the early instances of the Editor's Department columns that he produced.

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with these various tributes to him, his final book notice (see pages 680–681). It reviews a festschrift honoring a former student of his, P. J. Mistry, and thus it was a book of some not inconsiderable personal interest to Bill. The notice was written, quite obviously, when he was still active, and as its introductory paragraph suggests, perhaps now with a bit of irony, it came at a sort of watershed moment for him, when he was reflecting on his life and his longevity in the field.

Many readers of *Language* will have had some interaction with Bill over the years, whether as a student of his, as a colleague, as an author—prospective or actual—in *Language*, or even just as a consumer of the fine scholarship he produced in articles and books, not to mention the edited volumes he was responsible for.

On a personal note, my interactions with Bill mostly revolved around *Language* in some way or other. He was the editor who in 1979 accepted my first major article for publication ('Language universals and syntactic change', *Language* 56.2.345–70, 1980). He was also the editor who, by working with that item and others of mine that I put before him in the early 1980s (in particular a few book notices and reviews), taught me how effective editors can improve an author's text and thereby help authors actually convey successfully what they want to say. Indeed, in an earlier Editor's Department ('Editing, prescriptivism, and free speech', *Language* 79.1.1–4, 2003), I wrote about the license editors often take in rewriting pieces submitted by others that are to appear in the journal; part of what I had in mind was the way Bill took such liberties with my wording but in so doing produced dramatic improvements to my text. Finally, Bill was the former editor of this journal who, in an avuncular way, offered welcome (and explicitly solicited) advice on *Language*-related matters on several occasions; I was glad of his guidance and wisdom each time and regret now that I did not ask him more often.

Bill published occasional noteworthy letters he received as editor in the Editor's Department, and in that vein, let me in closing invite others to share any personal reminiscences of Bill that they might have for inclusion in the 'Letters to *Language*' section. This section is an innovation vis-à-vis Bill's day, but it is one that I know he approved of, since he advised me on a few letters that I published in the past few years; thus, I am pleased that his hand is present even there as well.

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