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Starting *BLC*: 1996–1998*

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This short piece relates how BLC was started, from the decision to begin a new journal in the spring of 1996 all the way to the publication of the first issue in June 1998. The topics covered are: writing a proposal, choosing a publisher, getting things started at Cambridge University Press and within the editorial team, and preparing the first issue.

Few academics have the privilege (or should one say the folly?) of starting a new academic journal, in this case *BLC*. This is an account of how things took place between 1996 and 1998. The idea of having a journal dedicated to fundamental research in bilingualism was in the minds of several researchers in the late 1990s. It came as no real surprise to Juergen Meisel and Pieter Musyken, therefore, that I should broach the subject on March 26, 1996, when I visited them at NIAS (the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences) in Wassenaar. I proposed that the three of us think about starting a journal and they were immediately very open to the idea; we spent part of the day discussing such things as putting together a proposal, finding a top publisher, and even when the first issue would come out (some time in 1998). We also discussed another journal project which was later to materialize under the editorship of Li Wei and Nick Miller as the *International Journal of Bilingualism* (*IJB*). We felt that there was room for two new journals and that each one would end up having its particular focus, audience, editorial organization, and so forth.

The proposal

The project really started taking shape with the draft of a proposal that I sent to my two colleagues in July 1996 and that we reworked together over the next few weeks. In it we stressed that research on the many facets of bilingualism – political, societal, educational, psychological, developmental, and linguistic – had enjoyed a new boom in recent years, as could be seen from the books published, the research conducted, the conferences and workshops held, etc. A problem, though, was that the literature on bilingualism was dispersed across a large number of journals in the human and social sciences. For example, papers with a cognitive science slant such as those that dealt with bilingual language competence and development, language and cognitive processing in bilinguals, the bilingual brain, computational modeling of bilingual processes, etc. were still being published in mainstream journals that catered first and foremost to the discipline in question (theoretical linguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc.) and not to bilingualism as such. In addition, these journals were not always easy to find and were rarely present in just one library, hence the difficulty of covering the field adequately. We argued that papers on these topics could be attracted to a new journal if a number of conditions were met. Among these were the cognitive science slant that we would give, the use of the journal to debate important theoretical, methodological and modeling issues, the professionalism of its editorial team, and the reputation of the publisher.

The proposal also contained an overview of the journal as we saw it. Its name would need to be concise (e.g. preferably *Bilingualism*, or *Bilingualism Science*, or *Research in Bilingualism*). It would focus on fundamental research as opposed to applied research and it would emphasize theories and models. It would deal mainly with the type of micro topics covered in cognitive science as opposed to the more macro topics of social sciences, and it would encourage debate in the field by publishing commentaries along with papers following the approach used by *Brain and Behavioral Sciences*. The editorial structure would be simple and would only contain two layers, the Editors and the Editorial Board. There would be four editors who would share the responsibility for the journal and who would do the editorial work (send manuscripts out for review, interact with authors, solicit commentaries, etc.). Each editor would represent several areas of expertise so as to be able to deal appropriately with manuscripts from various domains. All editors would have the same prerogatives but one of them, the Coordinating Editor (CE), would have the additional task of receiving manuscripts from authors, allocating them to the various editors, coordinating the content of an issue, putting it together, etc. In addition, the CE would interact with the publisher and would be the spokesperson for the editorial team. The extra responsibility of being a CE would rotate among the editors every five years or so. Members of the Editorial Board would be leading experts in the field of

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bilingualism although we would also invite researchers who did not work directly on bilingualism so as to allow for input from mainstream research. Members of the Board would be asked to review manuscripts and to help the journal establish itself. We planned to start with three issues a year and increase this number in later years if the journal received enough manuscripts of quality. The first issue would be in March 1998. We concluded the proposal by stating that several indicators pointed towards the success of a journal of this type: its cognitive science research slant that was not covered by other journals in the field; its publication format (articles plus commentaries) which would encourage debate on important theoretical, methodological and modeling issues in the field, and its editorial team which would be made up of experienced researchers in the field. Some ten years later, it is interesting to see how much of what we wrote actually materialized.

We sent the proposal to five leading publishers in August 1996 and as we waited for their answers, we worked on two important aspects. First, we looked for a fourth editor and in late September, Judy Kroll kindly accepted to join our team. We informed the prospective publishers of this. Second, we wrote an official letter of invitation to potential members of the Editorial Board in which we informed them of our project. We insisted on what we saw as our two main aims: promoting research on bilingualism from a cognitive sciences perspective and encouraging debate in the field. We also told them about the rather simple editorial structure we wanted to implement. As the positive responses came in (I don't recall receiving one single refusal), we sent the names on to the publishers.

Choosing a publisher

Of the five publishers we had contacted, four got back to us in the fall of 1996 with enthusiastic responses. We were therefore in the privileged position of weighing the pros and cons of each publisher, keeping the following factors in mind: reputation, quality of its journals, level of enthusiasm for our project, financial and administrative support, marketing strength, duration of the initial contract, etc. We finally decided to negotiate with Cambridge University Press and our contact person for the next four months was Penny Carter, the Journals Deputy Director. It was during the final discussions with her, and at her request, that we decided who the first Coordinating Editor would be. On November 16, I wrote the following to my three colleagues: "Recall that this is a collegiate and rotating system 'à la suisse', that the main decisions are taken all together and that every editor will coordinate the journal at some point." It was agreed that I should be the one to start. Cambridge University Press also wanted to have a subtitle to the title *Bilingualism*; they proposed *Linguistics and Cognition* and we finally agreed on *Language and Cognition*. We also negotiated how many researchers would be on the Editorial Board and the duration of their mandate. Finally, Penny Carter encouraged us strongly to have the three types of papers we currently have (we had mainly thought of Keynote Articles) as, according to her, the latter require a lot of work and can cause publication delays. She was also the one who suggested a name for these articles.

On November 25, 1997, the Press Syndicate (i.e. the Board of governors) met in the lovely Oriel Room of the Press's Pitt Building in Cambridge and voted to start the journal. Every new book and journal requires the approval of the Syndicate before it is published by the Press in the name of the University of Cambridge. *BLC* has many birth dates (the day of the NIAS meeting, the day we signed the contract, the day we received the first issue) but this is certainly one of the more important ones. Penny Carter wrote the following to me a few days later: "I and my colleagues (and the Press's Board of governors, the Syndicate) are very confident that the combination of such a strong editorial team, the reputation of the Cambridge imprint and the publishing expertise Cambridge hopes to bring to the project will ensure that *Bilingualism* is quickly recognised and established as a major international journal in an exciting and fast-developing field."[1]

A visit to the Press in Cambridge in late November 1996 helped me realize that this was more than just another intellectual project to add to the many others academics have during their career. Susan Chadwick explained in great details the marketing campaign she had prepared for *BLC*: a press release (which was sent out in December), a call for papers, various announcements in workshops and conferences, etc. And Trevor Burling, in charge of the production of our future journal, defined its composition specifications. Some things I had thought about (e.g. our wish to have a US A4 format along the lines of *Psychological Science*) but many others were specified on the spur of the moment: number of columns, text type (Times 10/12 justified), layout of the cover material, organization of the first pages of the articles, even details concerning the abstracts, the footnotes, the subheadings, etc. This, in addition to a visit of the actual printing facility at Cambridge University Press, was truly a learning experience for someone ignorant of the complex world of book and journal production. In mid-January 1997, Penny Carter sent a Memorandum of Agreement to the four editors for their signature. The document, printed on thick green paper, contained some 16 clauses which dealt with such things as the number of manuscripts we would send to the Press each year, their length in pages, the production schedule, etc. As I read through it, reality

[1] All my thanks to Penny Carter and Geoffrey Nuttall for their permission to cite this extract.

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came crashing down on me: we had exactly 15 months to get a first issue out, followed by issues every four months after that!

Getting things started

1997 was a year of intense activity for both the *BLC* team at Cambridge University Press (under the leadership of Patrick McCartan as of February 1997) and for the scientific editorial team. Below, I will separate what each team did but it should be kept in mind that there was constant communication between them.

Activities of the BLC *team at Cambridge University Press*

In February, a call for papers was sent out. The four-sided leaflet contained the names of the four editors, the final list of the Editorial Board, the aims and scope of the journal, the types of papers accepted, and the actual announcement calling for papers which read as follows:

> The editors invite the submission of papers that concern the bilingual person and that involve the research methodologies and the theoretical and modeling approaches used in cognitive science. The overriding criterion for consideration and subsequent acceptance, after peer review, is that papers make a truly significant contribution, either empirically and/or theoretically, to one of the domains listed above.

The domains were: bilingual language competence, perception and production, bilingual language acquisition in children and adults, neurolinguistics of bilingualism in normal and brain-damaged subjects, and non-linguistic cognitive processes in bilinguals.

In addition, a complete marketing plan was set up including the mailing of the call for papers, mailings of catalogues (including the Cambridge University Press Journals Catalogue), an advertising campaign in other journals, publicity in exhibitions and conferences, electronic marketing, follow up mailings and lists of who would get sample copies, etc. As early as January 1997, some 17 months before the first issue was published, *BLC* was given an ISSN: 1366-7289. The design of the journal continued at the Press and much work was put into the cover. In February, we received three potential covers which can be seen on Cambridge Journals Online at the following address: http://journals.cambridge.org/BLC_alternative_covers. They were quite different from one another: C1 was considered lively and colorful but the lettering on the side posed problems. C2 was felt to be more conservative but the background was not right for a journal on language and there were also problems with the typography. As for C3, it was inspired by the cover of *Life with Two Languages* (I was the first surprised to see it!), but the colors were a bit too bright and the lettering had problems. We agreed with the Press that they would rework C2 and C3 and in April two covers came back: C2 revised and C3 revised (these can also be seen at the same web location). Small polls were held in the editors' university groups and C2 revised was chosen by all. But we then received *IJB*'s first issue and realized that they too had put the word "bilingualism" in various languages on their cover. So we fell back on C3 revised which was then reworked a bit to avoid the strong red, white and blue color scheme. C3 final became the journal's cover and was used henceforth in all documents relating to the journal, such as the second flyer produced at the end of 1997. Work also started on the journal's web page so that it would be on-line before the first issue came out.

Activities of the BLC *editors*

The editors worked on four things during 1997. First, in addition to the Press' call for papers, we contacted leading researchers in the field to encourage them to submit a paper to the first issues. We described the aims of the journal and the types of papers the journal would have (keynote articles, research articles and research notes). We added that any paper received would go through a normal review process. We received many encouraging responses from our colleagues even if some did not feel they could meet the June 1997 deadline to be sure that their paper was published in the first issue. A second task was to write the Instructions for Contributors which can be found on the inside back cover of the journal and on the journal's web site. We drafted the document and interacted closely with the Press on certain aspects, e.g. the length of the three types of papers, how manuscripts should be prepared, where they should be submitted, etc. A number of principles guided us: we wanted the instructions to be as clear as possible and to cover the kinds of papers we were looking for (theoretical, descriptive, experimental, etc.); we also wanted to discourage weaker papers from being submitted; and we wanted to give enough manuscript preparation details so as not to waste time later interacting with authors to have certain stylistic changes made before a paper was ready for copy editing.

A third task was to draft and agree upon the Manuscript Processing Procedure, a seven-page document for the sole use of the editors of the journal. Since we would be working independently of one another, in separate countries, and there was no overseeing editor to whom all reviewed manuscripts would be sent for final confirmation, we worked out a detailed procedure for the processing of articles which we would all adhere to. Without giving away current editorial secrets, we agreed on the following stages. The CE would receive manuscripts and check that the Instructions for Contributors had been respected (if this wasn't the case, manuscripts were sent back). The CE would fill out a Manuscript Processing Form and select an editor who would be in charge of the manuscript

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during the reviewing process (the action editor). The choice was based on the person's areas of expertise and current workload. During the reviewing stage of a paper, reviewers would be chosen by the action editor from within the Editorial Board and sometimes from outside the Board. Papers would be sent to three reviewers (if at all possible) accompanied by a cover letter that spelled out the type of paper being submitted and what was being asked of the reviewers. Based on the reviews received, the action editor could come to one of four decisions which would be transmitted to the author(s) in a detailed cover letter. We also worked out what would happen when revised manuscripts or resubmitted manuscripts were sent back. In addition, special procedures were developed for keynote articles such as how to choose commentators, what they would be asked to do, when the author's response should be obtained, etc. Finally, we worked out rules for manuscripts submitted by the CE or close collaborators of the editors, and we agreed upon appeal procedures for each stage of the reviewing process.

The final task that the editors took on during 1997 was to actually process the papers that started coming in and send them out for review. Based on the progress being made with reviewed manuscripts, the first issue started to emerge by the early summer of that year.

The first issue

We were lucky to have a keynote paper submitted by Manfred Pienemann, "Developmental dynamics in L1 and L2 acquisition: Processability theory and generative entrenchment", which, after review, could be programmed for the first issue. Then, Juegen Meisel invited eight researchers (Ellen Bialystok, Susanne Carroll, Kees de Bot, Jan Hulstijn, Gerard Kempen, Pieter Muysken, Jacquelyn Schachter and Bonnie Schwartz) to comment on it rapidly (no small feat!). The author then wrote his response. The two other papers in the issue were research papers, by David Sankoff, "A formal production-based explanation of the facts of code-switching", and by Ton Dijkstra, Henk Van Jaarsveld and Sjoerd Ten Brinke, "Interlingual homograph recognition: Effects of task demands and language intermixing". In addition, an editorial was drafted and passed around to all editors for their suggestions. In it, we repeated the reasons that had led us to start a journal, we stated what our aims were (promote research on the bilingual person and encourage debate in the field), we presented the three papers in the first issue, and we ended with a thought for those who had worked in the field before us: "We hope that this journal will honor the spirit of our predecessors who founded this discipline and who nurtured it despite its original marginal status. It is our hope that it will reflect the central place that scholarship on bilingualism has started to assume in the various branches of linguistics and the cognitive sciences". The manuscript of the first issue was sent to Cambridge University Press on 14 December 1997 from Neuchâtel. It was a shortish issue (48,448 words) but having worked on it allowed us to rectify things in preparation for future issues; for example, we changed the length restrictions on papers and commentaries which were a bit too strict.

The issue was copy edited by Philippa Youngman, a very experienced person who had the breadth of knowledge to cover the many domains covered by the journal. The proofs were checked in March 1998 and the revises in May. Since this was the first issue, work on the material for the inside and outside covers took time to deal with, not to mention small but time-consuming things such as typographical details, the table of contents, acceptance and revision statements, the size of headings, etc. (I stopped counting the number of faxes from the Press that arrived on my desk during those last months!). As we awaited the printed version of the first issue, we kept processing manuscripts and were already preparing the second issue. The editors also finally met as a group for the first time, in Amsterdam, on June 28, to plan the future of the journal (everything had been done by e-mail up to that point!). The very next day, Cambridge University Press sent each one of us a copy of the first issue and we could finally admire what we had been working on for so many months. Each one of us celebrated the birth of our journal in our respective universities. My own thoughts went to the *BLC* team at Cambridge with whom I had worked so much as CE, and I wrote the following note to them on that same day: "I still remember vividly my morning at the Press back in December 1996, surrounded by Penny, Trevor and Sue, and how we talked about the physical appearance of the journal and the calendar leading to the first issue. Not having gone down this route before (how many academics actually start journals?), I sometimes doubted we would ever get there. However, your steadfast optimism activated mine and we now have a beautiful new journal."

BLC has now reached its tenth birthday and I can only wish it many more years of excellence!

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