CHARLES A. FERGUSON

Charles Albert Ferguson, better known to friends and colleagues as 'Fergie', was born in Philadelphia in 1921, and died in Palo Alto, California in 1998. He will be long remembered not only as a major scholar in many fields—psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, Arabic and Bengali, phonology, applied linguistics, and the study of language in religion—but also as a gifted teacher, as an unending source of inspiration to his students and colleagues, and as a warm-hearted friend.[1]

Ferguson came from a working-class family, but on completing high school in 1939, he won a four-year scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, where he took his B.A. in philosophy. He then stayed on at Penn for graduate work in oriental studies; he wrote a master's thesis on Moroccan Arabic and a doctoral dissertation on Bengali, receiving his doctorate in 1945. His primary adviser throughout was Zellig Harris; but during the same period he began a longstanding interaction with Roman Jakobson, especially with reference to 'his interest in the relationship between linguistic theory and language development in the child' (Ferguson 1995a:14). During the same period, Ferguson began his apprenticeship in language teaching. As a graduate student during World War II, he received fellowship support from the Intensive Language Program of the American Council of Learned Societies; the experience he received in language teaching and in designing language programs convinced him that, like first language acquisition, 'the process of second language acquisition . . . offered a unique and valuable window on linguistic structure' (1995a:16).

In 1947, Ferguson accepted a position at the newly established Foreign Service Institute of the US State Department, which assigned him to set up an Arabic language school in Beirut; in his work there, 'he began to define the parameters of what he later came to call a ''language situation,'' an aggregate of dialects, registers, and genres and their patterns of acquisition and use by and among linguistic communities' (Huebner 1999:432). In 1955 he moved to a post teaching linguistics and Arabic at Harvard, where he made contact with social scientists interested in language, such as Dell Hymes and Roger Brown. There too his 'interests in language acquisition and social attitudes toward language were strengthened and given more shape' (1995a:18). In 1959, he participated in planning for a 'clearinghouse and informal coordinating body' for the solution of practical problems (1995a:28); he suggested the name Center for Applied Linguistics, and was appointed as its first director when that organization was set up in Washington, DC—continuing a career in which he was 'constantly operating with a professional tension between solving practical language problems and doing academic linguistics' (1995a:17). Ferguson found this tension to be valuable; as he wrote in later years, 'It has always seemed to me that a theory that has little or no practical problem-solving capacity is *ipso facto* less good than one that does, and that one of the best places to look for clues to theory is in situations of ''application'' ' (1995a:22).

In 1967, Ferguson went to Stanford University to chair the Committee on Linguistics

[1] Many scholars have helped us to assemble the information in this obituary. We express our gratitude to Donna Christian, Eve V. Clark, Shirley Brice Heath, Thom Huebner, Bh. Krishnamurti, Marlys A. Macken, Brian MacWhinney, Ann M. Peters, Dan I. Slobin, Catherine Snow, Carol Stoel-Gammon, Elizabeth C. Traugott, and Marilyn M. Vihman, in addition to those colleagues we have quoted directly. We have relied heavy on many published sources, including Dil 1971, Ferguson 1995a, 1997, Fishman 1986, Huebner 1996, 1999, and Paulston & Tucker 1997. The bibliography of Ferguson's writings which appears below is based on information from Fishman et al. (1986:577–90), from Huebner 1996, and from other references.

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and to work towards creating a linguistics department. There he taught courses in sociolinguistics and child language in addition to general linguistics, and so at last resolved the ' ''constructive tension'' between applied work and more purely academic responsibilities' (1995a:20). By 1969, he had begun the Stanford Child Phonology Project, supported principally by the National Science Foundation. Together with Eve V. Clark, he was responsible for making Stanford the premier linguistics department in the nation in the study of language acquisition (the topic has otherwise been studied mainly in departments of psychology or of speech-language-hearing science). In the period 1967–76, Ferguson and Joseph Greenberg directed the Language Universals Project at Stanford, supported by the Social Science Research Council, with the intent 'to reinvigorate a more empiricist approach to the construction of linguistic theory' (1995a:20); the project and its resulting publications (twenty collections of working papers, plus the four volumes edited by Greenberg, Ferguson and Moravcsik (1978) did much to stimulate subsequent activity in 'typological-universalist' approaches to language (1995a:21). He became emeritus in 1988, but for several years he continued research, writing, and travel, frequently with his wife Shirley Brice Heath, an anthropologist whom he married in 1979.

Following his retirement, he continued to expand his interests in language by teaching a course at the Bread Loaf School of English in 1988, on biography and autobiography, developing a keen interest in the writings of Virginia Woolf in these genres. In that same summer, he also taught a course on language learning, the only course ever taught in English at the Middlebury College summer language program; he allowed students in the course to write their papers in any of the languages they were studying.

It will not be an exaggeration to state that no American linguist has had a greater impact on Arabic linguistics than Ferguson. He is best known in the field for his important article on diglossia (1959a), which has been reprinted and translated into other languages several times. To date, this article has generated approximately three thousand articles, theses, and monographs in and on many different languages—287 dealing with Arabic alone. Ferguson's contributions, however, go far beyond the ongoing linguistic debate over diglossia. He addressed issues as varied as the history of modern Arabic dialects, their synchronic phonology, politeness formulas, proverbs, baby talk, language attitudes, rhymes, and the problems of developing teaching materials for diglossic languages like Arabic, and also contributed numerous reviews and bibliographies. In all his work, he attempted to understand language matters in their broader context, and in the process, to set a standard for accuracy of observation, for careful analysis, and for the variety of sources consulted.

Ferguson's involvement with Arabic dates back to the early 1940s, when he began researching Moroccan Arabic as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. His experience of working with native speakers of Moroccan Arabic, living in New York, resulted in a lifelong commitment and a sustained interest in Arabic. In 1947, he founded a branch of the Foreign Service Institute in Beirut, returning later to run the Arabic language school there from 1953 to 1955. While in Beirut, he was recruited by Prof. Edward Mason of Harvard to join Harvard's newly founded Middle East Center, where he wound up teaching Arabic from 1955 to 1959. When he left Harvard in 1959 to become the first director of the newly founded Center for Applied Linguistics, he began to direct special attention to less commonly taught languages such as Arabic. During his tenure at CAL, he also played a pivotal role in the founding of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA) in 1963.

Upon joining Stanford University in January 1967, Ferguson maintained his interest

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in Arabic, and he continued to be outspoken in questioning the academic status quo in Middle Eastern studies and linguistics. The exclusive emphasis on the study of classical Arabic as a way of deciphering medieval texts had been the prevailing exercise in US universities until the late 1960s. Ferguson's creative approaches to Arabic teaching, along with his persistence in challenging the existing state of affairs, had driven the chair of linguistics at Harvard, the Indo-Europeanist Joshua Whatmough, to call Ferguson 'presumptuous'. In spite of such attitudes, Ferguson's steadily growing influence helped lend legitimacy to the serious study of modern varieties of Arabic.

Even when Ferguson was not professionally focused on Arabic, issues of Arabic speech communities figured prominently in his teaching and his scholarship. When he was asked which articles he most enjoyed producing during his career, he named four, including one on Arabic. Interestingly, the article on diglossia was not on the list; instead, he mentioned another 1959 article, 'The Arabic koine', in which he argued for a more or less homogeneous, dialect-leveled koine in the early centuries of Islam as the linguistic ancestor of most colloquial varieties of Arabic.

As he approached his formal retirement in 1988, Ferguson actively revisited his Arabic beginnings. He played a central role in the founding of the Arabic Linguistics Society (ALS) in 1986; he was its first keynote speaker in 1987, and was then elected its president in 1991. In March 1999, the ALS—which had been planning all along to hold its annual meeting at Stanford, specifically to acknowledge Ferguson's many contributions to Arabic language and linguistics—sadly convened on the Stanford campus without its guest of honor.

Apart from Ferguson's interest in Arabic, he had a special areal interest in South Asia, starting with his early work on Bengali. In the 1950s he was a member of the committee of American Indologists appointed by the Rockefeller Foundation to supervise the linguistics program the Foundation was sponsoring at Deccan College, Poona (India). This program was destined to launch a whole generation of Indian and American specialists in South Asian linguistics—a cohort of scholars that played a vital role in the blooming of sociolinguistics from the 1960s onward (cf. Ferguson 1997:82). In 1956 Ferguson taught at Deccan College, where he met many specialists in South Asian linguistics; subsequently he coedited a pioneering volume on the sociolinguistics of the area (Ferguson & Gumperz 1960). In 1964, in Lahore (Pakistan), he was made an Honorary Life Member of the Linguistic Research Group of Pakistan. In his later years, Ferguson wrote an especially important article on South Asia as a sociolinguistic area (1992d). Carrying out teaching and research on five continents, he was truly a linguistic citizen of the world.

Within 'pure' linguistics, Ferguson had special interests in phonology and morphology, both synchronic and diachronic. Many of his juniors may remember that their first understanding of generative phonology came not so much from Morris Halle's pioneering *Sound pattern of Russian* (1959) as from Ferguson's long, appreciative but constructively critical review of that book (1962d). Fergie also published substantive work on the phonology and morphology of Arabic (1956b, 1957a, 1969a), of Bengali (1960e, 1964h, 1966e), and of English (1973d). His contributions to the study of universals were especially focused on phonological patterns (1963b, 1975c). In addition, most of his work in psycholinguistics, to be discussed below, was directed to phonology. Finally, his interest in historical phonology and morphology was especially apparent in his late works on the diachrony of sibilants (1990a), on changes in 'politeness agreement' (1991c), and on loss of agreement in Germanic (1996b).

Ferguson was a participant in American sociolinguistics from its earliest stages, being

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a member of the UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference in the spring of 1964 (proceedings published as Bright 1966, cf. Ferguson 1997, Huebner 1997). He was chair of the Committee on Sociolinguistics of the Social Science Research Council from 1964 to 1970, he chaired the national seminar on sociolinguistics sponsored by the committee at Indiana University in summer 1964, and he was active in many further conferences and publications devoted to the topic in subsequent years. Recalling these beginnings, he wrote in later years:

> I had always viewed language as primarily a social phenomenon, and with the new Chomskyan emphasis on language as a matter of individual cognitive competence, I felt that one of the principal problems of linguistics was how to understand the relation between individual competence and socially shared competence . . . My own contributions to sociolinguistic research had been quite varied: concern with different types of language situations and their possible outcomes over time; the processes of language standardization, language planning and public policy, in particular language problems of so-called 'developing countries', and register variation, i.e. variation in linguistic structure correlating with different occasions of use. (1995a:119–20)

Ferguson himself cited three papers that he considered his 'most original' contributions (1995a:21) on the social nature of language: 'Diglossia' (1959a), 'Structure and use of politeness formulas' (1976d), and 'Sports announcer talk' (1983g).

In the area of diglossia—a term which Ferguson introduced to English, and made a standard part of linguistic vocabulary—his initial article has been reprinted and translated repeatedly, and has inspired a whole bookshelf of scholarly works, including two extensive bibliographies (Hudson 1992, Fernandez 1994). A retrospective view of the topic by Ferguson himself was also published (1991d).

Ferguson's lifelong interest in register began with work on proverbs, riddles, and politeness formulas in Bengali and Arabic (Ferguson & Preston 1946a,b, Ferguson 1967a, 1976d). He later expanded it to simplified registers such as 'foreigner talk' (a term he coined, 1971c) and 'baby talk'—not the speech used BY foreigners or babies, but the speech used TO them by fluent members of a speech community (1956a, 1964a). His work on the latter phenomenon, otherwise known as caretaker talk—or, more recently, as child-directed speech (CDS)—was of course closely linked to his interest in language acquisition by children. Ferguson inspired 'a generation of literature on the role of caretaker talk in the development of a child's communicative competence' (Huebner 1999); an example is the volume edited by Snow and Ferguson (1977). Similarly, Ferguson's ideas on foreigner talk were expanded in later articles (e.g. 1975g), and the concept was the topic of an edited collection (Clyne 1981). Ferguson's interest in such matters led him even further, as in his work on sports announcer talk (1983g), and he edited a collection of papers *Special language registers* (1985a).

Another special sociolinguistic field of Ferguson's, in macro-sociolinguistics and language planning, was reflected in many publications. Especially to be mentioned are his pioneering paper 'The language factor in national development' (1962b), 'National sociolinguistic profile formulas' (1966f), his essay 'Language development' (1968b), and his 'Sociolinguistic settings of language planning' (1977c).

An additional concern of Ferguson's—which in fact combined his interests in phonology, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and applied linguistics—was literacy and writing systems. His publications in this area include his essay on St. Stefan of Perm, who brought literacy to the Komi people of Central Asia in the fourteenth century (1967b), a work on literacy in Ethiopia (1971b), a study of the phenomenon among the Diyari of Australia (1987a), and his masterful long review (1995b) of a book by

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William Smalley et al. (1990), on an indigenous script used by the Hmong people of Laos.

Ferguson (1995a:21) described his 'interest in language acquisition, both the natural language development of the child and the learning of a second, third, or nth language as child or adult' as extending throughout his lifetime. He 'felt that one of the principal problems of linguistics was how to understand the relation between individual competence and socially shared competence . . . the problem of conventionalization' (ibid., 19–20). Clear forces in his work were his beliefs in the importance of training young scholars and of making information accessible to the widest possible audience. Shortly after Ferguson's arrival at Stanford, he organized—along with Susan M. Ervin-Tripp, John Gumperz, and Dan Slobin—the 1968 workshop on the crosslinguistic study of the acquisition of communicative competence. This was a summer-long series of courses that included Ursula Bellugi, Martin Braine, and Courtney Cazden among the instructors. This group of scholars played a central role in defining the field and training a first cohort of students, who included Marian Blank, Ben Blount, Melissa Bowerman, Keith Kernan, Brian MacWhinney, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, Arlene I. (Breyne) Moskowitz, Ann Peters, Carol Stoel-Gammon, Brian Stross, and Carolyn Wardrip.

In 1973, Ferguson and Slobin published *Studies of child language development*, one of the two classic collections of scattered early work on all aspects of language acquisition that mark the real emergence of child language as a field of study (the other, published at about the same time, was Bar-Adon & Leopold 1971).[2] Ferguson, David Olmsted, and Slobin also formed an editorial committee to revise Werner Leopold's bibliography of child language; this was published as Slobin 1972, and become the ancestor of the current Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) on-line/CD-ROM bibliography. (Ever the man of principle, Ferguson arranged for royalties from Ferguson et al. 1992 to be paid directly to CHILDES, and he actively negotiated for the lowest possible prices for books he edited.)

Ferguson's specific interests within language acquisition lay in child phonology, child-directed speech, and second language acquisition. Under his direction, the Stanford Child Phonology Project (ca. 1967–90) became the national and then the international center for work on the development of phonology. Its goals were to attempt to answer fundamental questions about phonological development—such as the relationship between perception and production, and the role of the ambient language—by establishing and analyzing an appropriate data base. The center established and exemplified standards for longitudinal multi-child data collection, for phonetic transcription of child language, for analysis of such large quantities of data, and for sharing data among researchers. The generation of researchers it trained included David Barton, David Ingram, Carolyn Johnson, Marlys A. Macken, Lise Menn, Carol Stoel-Gammon, and Marilyn M. Vihman. Ferguson's role in nurturing this developing field is further evidenced by the number of child language publications that he coauthored or coedited with these and other colleagues, including the definitive conference volumes *Child phonology*: *Production and perception* (Yeni-Komshian, Kavanagh, & Ferguson 1980, 2 vols.) and *Phonological development*: *Models*, *research*, *implications* (Ferguson, Menn, & Stoel-Gammon 1992). Recurrent themes in his steady stream of papers include

[2] Dan Slobin recalls that inclusion of the dedication of Ferguson & Slobin 1973—"To the memory of the children of our times who have been prevented from learning to speak by bombs, bullets, gas, and napalm"—was a precondition they made to publishers, and they rejected a publisher who refused to print it.

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the importance of observations that can speak to theories, as well as the need to create theories that can deal both with emergent general trends and with the intricacies of individual variation. The papers include straightforward analyses of the limitations of then current linguistically and psychologically based theories, and demonstrations that no single level of phonological analysis—be it feature, phoneme, syllable, or word—would suffice to handle the observed child data patterns. This led some contemporaries to shrug Ferguson off as a man with 'data but no theory'. In fact, he was making the argument that lexically based variation in child phonological forms requires an instance-based theory of rule learning: a radical idea in late neogrammarian 1975. Since then, although it is no less controversial, this idea has become the cornerstone of cognitive approaches to language acquisition (cf. Maratsos & Chalkley 1980, Peters & Menn 1993) and of connectionist modeling (Elman et al. 1996, MacWhinney 1998, Bates & Goodman 1999, Smith 1999).

Ferguson's interest in language register intersected with his interest in language acquisition in the famous paper 'Baby talk in six languages' (1964a) and in *Talking to children*, the pioneering volume on child-directed speech that he co-edited with Catherine Snow (1977d).

Perhaps characteristically for this man whose great role was in opening and fostering research, his retrospective view of his work concluded in this way (1995a:22): 'I regard language learning as a special case of language change . . . this point of view was spelled out in Ferguson [1968c] but its full implications have not been explored'.

Virtually alone among prominent American linguists, Ferguson devoted an important part of his research and teaching to the topic of language and religion; this grew out of his own quiet but deep religious faith. In 1973 he taught a summer class on the subject at the University of Michigan, treating 'phenomena not usually discussed in linguistics classes', starting with dialect variation based on religious affiliation, and ending with a demonstration of glossolalia (1995a:22). His important publications on the subject include the article mentioned above about Saint Stefan of Perm and applied linguistics (1967b), as well as works on the collect as a form of discourse (1976c) and on religious factors in language spread (1982a). A separate bibliography of his work in this area has been published by Huebner (1996:23–24).

Ferguson attended his first LSA meeting, though not as a member, in 1938 when he was a high school student. Subsequently, as a member of the society, he taught in several summer Linguistic Institutes, and was president of the LSA in 1970. He was among the initial participants in the Foreign Service Institute, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and the annual Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, as well as several important professional organizations—Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, the American Association of Teachers of Arabic, the Arabic Linguistic Society, and the International Association for the Study of Child Language. He held fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences; he was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and he was awarded honorary doctorates from the universities of Stockholm and Georgetown, and from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Three volumes of his collected papers have been published (Dil 1971, Huebner 1996, Belnap & Haeri 1997). He has been the honoree of a three-volume festschrift, edited by colleagues representing five continents and four different religious traditions (Fishman et al. 1986). The 1995 volume of the Georgetown Round Table was dedicated to him (Alatis et al. 1995).

Ferguson is especially remembered for the great personal attention he gave to encour-

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aging the work of students and colleagues, and to helping them get their research before the public. He was extraordinarily active throughout his career in organizing conferences and in editing (or coediting) collections of papers, often those that resulted from the conferences.

Ferguson was never happier than when he was organizing not only crossnational conferences, but also collections of papers—either on language problems within developing nations, or on language situations within particular nations. The work begun with colleagues in the 1960s (Fishman, Ferguson & Das Gupta 1968) continued in several other conferences, resulting in collections that examined ways to carry out sociolinguistic surveys (Ohannessian, Ferguson & Polomé 1975) and to sustain the interdisciplinary work necessary for language planning (Rubin, Jernudd, Das Gupta, Fishman & Ferguson 1977). Ferguson also took part in the five-nation Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Eastern Africa, one portion of which was published as a language survey of Ethiopia (Bender, Bowen, Cooper & Ferguson 1976). In the early 1980s, he joined with his wife, Shirley Brice Heath, to bring together an array of scholars working on language issues in the US, ranging from the disputed history of American English to the relations between language and medicine; this resulted in the publication of *Language in the USA* (1981), the royalties from which were assigned to the LSA. In the last two decades of his working life, anthropological fieldwork and travel with his wife in Latin America and Australia stimulated his interest in the religious history of indigenous languages, in alphabet debates, and in literacy programs; he leaves unfinished a volume on religious pioneers in alphabet development.

The importance of his encouragement to younger scholars and of his organizing talents is evident in many edited volumes, including Ferguson 1960a, Ferguson & Gumperz 1960b, Ferguson & Stewart 1963a, Fishman et al. 1968, Ferguson & Slobin 1973a, Ferguson et al. 1975a, 1975b, 1976a, 1977a, Snow & Ferguson 1977, Greenberg et al. 1978, Yeni-Komshian et al. 1980, Ferguson & Heath 1981a, Ferguson 1985a, Traugott et al. 1986, Barlow & Ferguson 1988, Huebner & Ferguson 1991, Enkvist et al. 1992a, and Ferguson et al. 1992b.

Many scholars have attested Ferguson's rare qualities as a scholar and a human being. Thus, introducing his first volume of collected papers, Anwar Dil wrote (1971: xiii): 'There is in [Ferguson's] work a certain quality of suggestiveness, as if he were more interested in opening new areas of linguistic interest for others through his explorations. Ferguson seems to take special delight in trying his hand at problems that do not lend themselves to an easy definition; he is content to pinpoint some of the complexities, and then suggest how they might be handled'.

Joshua Fishman has written (1986:vi–vii): 'Ferguson has the rare capacity of seeing all language-related phenomena in societal perspective . . . From the very genesis of modern sociolinguistic efforts, Ferguson has served as exemplar, umpire, godfather . . . gentle critic and proud defender of the field . . . He has always embraced . . . a complete, multi-level, multi-method approach to language in society, in order to build the broader understanding which is the new discipline's ultimate quest. This, indeed, is the truest measure of a scholar: one who does not cut down a field to his own size, . . . but instead recognizes, encourages and acquires the widest possible repertoire of methods and substantive emphases'.

Thom Huebner, speaking as a student of Ferguson's, has said (1996:vii) how he would marvel at Fergie's behavior at linguistic conferences, where he would 'gently, through tactful, self-effacing questioning, lead the presenter and the rest of us in the audience to new insights and implications for broader issues of language structure and

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use . . . I, along with hundreds of his students, have had the privilege of getting to know a man of impeccable academic rigor, professional integrity, and human kindness'. Elsewhere, Huebner has written (1999): 'Methodologically, Ferguson was sympathetic to both quantitative, micro-sociolinguistic methods and macro-sociolinguistic approaches. In his own work, however, he seemed most comfortable with informant work in the anthropological tradition of descriptive linguists and the careful scholarly examination of secondary sources in the tradition of European philologists'. We may recall that Ferguson in fact published an article entitled 'Linguistics as anthropology' (1977j).

Walt Wolfram, writing of Ferguson (1999), says, 'He never authored a book-length exposition of a specific sociolinguistic theory, or developed a particular method of sociolinguistic description or analysis; yet his work has touched virtually everyone in the field . . . he was a master of the pithy article, full of enticing observations that inspire other researchers to follow up the empirical and theoretical implications of his comments'.

The authors of this note can confirm these accolades from our own experience, and we add two points. First, Fergie presented his work in a clear, graceful, meticulous but unassuming style which, in itself, made many of us want to follow in his footsteps. Second, he LOVED LANGUAGE. He thought nothing of undertaking study of a language new to him (e.g. Sorbian, Old Church Russian) in order to do research on materials written in it. Unlike many linguists of recent generations whose interests have been reserved for particular languages, or for particular formal models of language, Ferguson was passionately involved in every aspect of the ways that human beings learn and use language to communicate. Like his mentor Roman Jakobson, he felt that nothing to do with language was foreign to him. He was one of the great generalists in linguistics, and we may not look upon his like again.

A memorial service in honor of Ferguson was held in Palo Alto on September 18, 1998, and was attended by colleagues from all over North America. The service included tributes from family, friends, and colleagues, as well as readings from sacred texts in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. He is survived by his wife, Shirley Brice Heath, who was also his partner in occasional team teaching, publication, and anthropological interests. He leaves two children, Lisa J. Arthur and Christina Toren (whose mother, Ferguson's first wife, Joanna Eichmuller, died in 1974); two stepchildren, Brice Wesley Heath and Shannon King Heath, and eight grandchildren. [Lise Menn, *University of Colorado*; William Bright, *University of Colorado*; Khalil Barhoum, *Stanford University*.]

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* Where Ferguson is not the first author or editor we have indicated the first author or editor with a dagger.

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