KENNETH LOCKE HALE

Everyone's life has a pivotal moment, a moment when, had things gone otherwise, we would be someone other than the person we turned out to be. In the case of Ken Hale that moment may have been in the life, or rather the death, of his grandfather. A Dartmouth alumnus, class of 1903, and, at the time of his death, chairman of the Illinois Bell telephone system, Floyd Orlin Hale suffered a fatal stroke while attending a Dartmouth-Yale football game. The inheritance occasioned by that untimely death enabled Ken's father to do something he had always wanted to do—exchange commercial banking in Chicago for ranching in Arizona. Ken Hale was six years old when Robert Locke Hale and his wife, Mary Adelaide, moved from Chicago to a ranch in Canelo, Arizona.

The transition from the leafy confines of an upscale neighborhood in Chicago to the crackled brown and clear-washed blue expanses of Arizona would have been traumatic for many. For Ken it was like introducing a fish to water. Anyone who ever visited Ken in his office would not have failed to notice the framed photograph of a rodeo cowboy caught in midair as he dove from horse to lassoed heifer. That picture, freezing in time as it did another 'mad pursuit', was to Ken what *Ode on a Grecian Urn* was to John Keats. It was a frozen moment in a time and place he never left behind, despite his incredible journey into the heady world of theoretical linguistics.

As a child, Ken spent his time trapping, shooting, and riding. He even planned to be a gunsmith. I once asked him if his father was good at ranching. He said his father was good at whatever he turned his hand to. That must have been where Ken got it from. Had he become a gunsmith instead of a linguist, his guns would have ended up behind glass in the Smithsonian Museum.

Ken went to the University of Arizona in 1952 and majored in anthropology, the closest program to native languages of the Southwest he could find. Even so, he divided his undergraduate days between weekend 'jackpot' rodeos, studying anthropology, and working on whatever native American languages came within earshot.

In 1955, his senior year at the University of Arizona, he won the bull riding event at the University's rodeo. From that day on, except for rare occasions that required a dress suit or a tuxedo, he never took off the belt buckle his winning ride earned him. That same year he also entered the bull riding event in the Tucson rodeo. His ride was immortalized on film in the movie *Arena*. There was a story in the Tucson paper the day after the rodeo. Under a headline that read: CLOWN SAVES WADDY FROM CHARGING BULL, the text began: 'Kenneth Hall narrowly escaped serious injury . . . '. The photograph caught Ken on his back kicking the bull in the face. That was the first Ken's father heard about it. He admonished Ken for his foolishness in entering the rodeo. Then he commiserated with him about the misspelling of his name, 'They either call us Hall, or Hull, or Hole'.

After he graduated from the University of Arizona, he entered graduate study in linguistics at Indiana University, Bloomington. His 1958 MA thesis, 'Class II prefixes in Navajo', and his 1959 PhD dissertation, 'A Papago grammar', both written under the guidance of his advisor, Carl Voegelin, drew heavily on linguistic knowledge he had acquired as a teenager.

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At the age of fourteen, he enrolled at the Verde Valley School in Sedona, Arizona. There he roomed with a Hopi boy and learned Hopi, and then with a Jemez boy and learned Jemez. Since neither language was written at the time, Ken developed his own system for each. His Spanish teacher wanted him to concentrate only on Spanish and then French; Ken said she never understood that he learned faster by working on several languages at once. He resented the time he had to spend on academic subjects other than languages. After two years, he managed to talk his parents into allowing him to return home. He was sixteen years old when he entered Tucson High School. Over the next two years he added Navajo, O'odam, Pachuco, and Polish to the growing list of languages he had mastered. Then he graduated from high school.

Ken's linguistic ability is legendary. Practically everyone who knew him has a story to tell. In 1978 Ken and I went to an LSA meeting in New York City. At lunchtime he had a few errands and asked if I would like to come along. The first stop was at the Irish consulate, where he was applying for a visa. He began the conversation with the receptionist in Gaelic. After five minutes she asked if he spoke English, apologizing that her own Gaelic was not up to his. People sometimes wonder why Ken spoke to her in Gaelic in the first place. The answer is courtesy: Ken believed it is a mark of respect to speak to someone in his or her own language.

In 1997 a *New York Times* interviewer asked him about his remarkable talent. Ken said that when he discovered he knew Navajo, he would 'go out every day and sit on a rock and talk Navajo to myself'. He was fifteen years old at the time. Ken's facility with language was awe-inspiring to the general public, something that put him in a class with other virtuosi like Mozart or Garry Kasparov. A few months after his death, Alistair Cooke in his weekly radio commentary *Letter from America* (Monday, December 3, 2001) aired this encomium:

> Kenneth Hale was a teacher of linguistics. He was a very modest man—a contradiction in itself—and could carry on conversations in something between 50 and 56 languages—about 20 of which were spoken only by remote native peoples.
>
> The gift came to him in boyhood as he played in his native Arizona with children of the Hopi and Navaho tribes.
>
> Those two tribal languages were only the first of a score of American Indian and Australian native languages, along with related dialects, that were dying out.
>
> At the end Kenneth Hale was the only speaker in the world of about half a dozen now defined as 'dead' tongues.

As extraordinary as his language skills were, they were matched by a creative theoretical imagination that has had a major impact on the shape of linguistic studies over the past quarter century. One of Ken's most influential (and controversial) proposals was his 1983 hypothesis (in 'Warlpiri and the grammar of non-configurational languages'; see bibliography) that in languages such as Warlpiri the mapping from argument structure to syntactic configuration works quite differently than it does in English. According to this hypothesis, such languages—called NONCONFIGURATIONAL—require no special syntactic position for the external argument and no movement into a hierarchically defined subject position. Such languages are expected to show a cluster of syntactic properties, including (but not limited to) free word order. Ken's NONCONFIGURATIONALITY PARAMETER set an agenda for research that continues to influence the field today. So, too, with his work on LEXICAL ARGUMENT STRUCTURE, an interest that began with his involvement in the Warlpiri Dictionary Project at MIT's Center for Cognitive Science in 1979 and culminated in the book that appeared within a year of his death.

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The majority of Hale's theoretical contributions are embodied in close to 130 scholarly articles. Two months before his death, he completed *Prolegomenon to a theory of lexical argument structure*. The volume examines the hypothesis that lexical items project a syntactic configuration defined over just two relations, complement and specifier, where these configurations are constrained to preclude iteration and to permit only binary branching. The work examines this hypothesis by methodically looking at a variety of constructions in English and elsewhere. It was a work cut short by his illness. There were so many other languages and constructions that Ken would have included had time allowed. (As co-author of this volume I am acutely aware of how much more he had to offer.)

But as significant as his theoretical work was and will continue to be, his efforts in language reclamation and maintenance were as important to him as anything else in his academic life. He focused on dictionaries as a way of preserving an endangered language, and he was instrumental in the development of lexicons ranging from the Warlpiri Dictionary Project to work on Ulwa and Miskitu (two Misumalpan languages native to Nicaragua). Part of the reason for the importance of this work to him, as well as his efforts on behalf of bilingual education—Hale co-authored a recommendation with Geoff O'Grady that formed the foundation of bilingual education in the Northern Territory of Australia—is that it had a moral dimension for him. Hale was driven by the need to help those whose resources left them helpless. Noam Chomsky referred to him as 'a voice for the voiceless'. His thirty-year membership in the antiwar organization Resist stemmed from the same drive to help the helpless.

An important part of his efforts in language reclamation and maintenance was his belief that native speakers trained as linguists were the best possible preservers of their languages. Consequently, he devoted a significant part of his academic life to training native speakers in central Australia, central America, and the southwestern United States. Josie White Eagle, Paul Platero, LaVerne Jeanne, Al Alvarez, and Ofelia Zepeda were among his early students.

In the last few years of his life he mentored Jessie Littledoe Fermino, a member of the Wampanoag community. This tribe includes two groups, the Aquina and the Mashpee. In the early 1990s Ken was invited by the Aquina to a meeting to discuss reclaiming Wampanoag. There was an agreement between the two groups that no outsiders would be invited without mutual consent. Somehow, the Aquina leaders failed to inform the Mashpee of their invitation to Ken. At the meeting Jessie objected to the stranger's presence. Ken explained that the only way Wampanoag could be reclaimed would be through the efforts of one of their own becoming a linguist, and he offered to train that person. A few years later Jessie received a grant to support such training. She chose MIT and Ken. The day she went to meet with him for the first time she hoped that he would not recognize her and remember her objections two years earlier. When she entered his office, the first thing Ken said was, 'Where have you been? I've been waiting for you'.

Ken had a lifelong love affair with the Aboriginal languages of Australia, a country he first visited in 1959. His mentor at Indiana University, Carl Voegelin, had founded the Archives of the Languages of the World with his wife, Florence Voegelin. Ken, following Voegelin's precepts, documented the basic morphology and core vocabulary of at least seventy languages, including Luritja, Arrernte, Alyawarr, and Warlpiri. David Nash reports (GLOT International 5 (9/10), 339–40, November/December 2001):

> [H]e made a more intensive study of many of these, notably varieties of Arrernte (Aranda), Warlpiri, Lardil (of Mornington Island, Gulf of Carpentaria), Ngarluma (at Roebourne), northern NT languages

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> Kunwinyku, Mara, Garrwa, various Wik dialects and Linngithigh (on western Cape York Peninsula), and Djabugay (near Cairns). In March-April 1961 he teamed up with Geoff O'Grady from Sydney University and the pair documented some 26 languages in a two-month survey from Port Augusta around the coast to Broome; in the NT Gulf country he teamed up with La Mont (Monty) West, a fellow student from Indiana University. Analysing the data back in the US, Hale in 1961 coined the term 'Pama-Nyungan' now generally applied to name the most numerous (and geographically extensive) classificatory grouping of Australian languages, the outline of which he published in 1966 (with Geoff O'Grady and the Voegelins).

Ken's first teaching job was in the anthropology department at the University of Illinois, where he worked from 1961–64. During this period he studied Nahuatl in Mexico and worked on Paman languages at Urbana while his colleague, Geoff O'Grady, worked on the Ngayarda languages at Indiana University. It was also during this period (the early 1960s) that Ken and Morris Halle first met, as it happens, at a meeting in Chicago of the Linguistic Society of America. Halle recalls lunchtime conversations with Ken which he described as nothing short of extraordinary. He and Chomsky were working on *The sound pattern of English* at the time. Halle said that as he described the work, Ken picked it up instantly, offering new and interesting ideas on every topic that Halle touched on. When I talked to Morris recently about these early conversations, he said, 'I thought he was a genius'. Halle recruited Hale to MIT in 1966. He remained on the linguistics faculty of the Institute until his death.

In his book *A Chinese mirror* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Press, 1991, p. 95) Henry Rosemont quotes a statement Ken once made that epitomizes his view of humanity and its languages:

> I will assume without further discussion that the purpose of humanity is to exercise to the greatest possible degree the intellectual powers which define its distinctive biological heritage, through the mental and material creation of the widest possible range of cultural products. And I will assume further, all things being equal, that anything that enhances this purpose is moral, and that anything that obstructs it is immoral. A number of things follow immediately from this. Thus, for example, the oppression of human groups and individuals violates the human purpose. And assuming that both breadth and depth are necessary to achieving the human purpose, its enabling condition is linguistic and cultural diversity. Only with diversity can it be guaranteed that all avenues of human intellectual progress will be traveled. From this it follows that local languages and cultures must be permitted to develop in accordance with the directions of progress which the communities involved define for themselves.

Over the course of his life a number of significant recognitions were bestowed on Ken, though he wore them uncomfortably because he was a genuinely modest man. Honored in his lifetime with three volumes and one collection of papers, he lived long enough to receive and acknowledge all of them. He was elected president of the Linguistic Society of America for the years 1994–95. In 1989 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and in the following year to the National Academy of Sciences. In 1981 he was appointed the Ferrari P. Ward Professor of Linguistics at MIT. I was department head at the time, and it was my duty to confer this honor on him. I knew that were he to hear of it before the fact, he would refuse it on the grounds that others in the department were more deserving. Since his appointment to the chair was unanimously recommended by his colleagues in an informal poll, I was able to confer the chair without his knowledge. When the appointment was finalized, I told him there was good news and bad news. The good news was that the Ferrari P. Ward Chair had a new recipient. The bad news was that he was it.

Ken and Sally were together for more than forty-six years. I once asked Sally how the two of them met. With her permission, I quote here what she wrote:

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I met Ken in 1947 when my mother and I visited friends on a neighboring ranch. I was two years older than Ken and thought him too young and scruffy to merit my attention. He was one of a small flock of little local boys who buzzed around on the ground or on horseback, being 'strong silent cowboy types'. Generally, to me, they seemed unwashed and fairly inarticulate. I got to know Ken better when we went off together to Verde Valley School in 1948. We were briefly 'an item' in 1949 but I was a fickle girl and busily tried out all the older boys in the school, to see what having boyfriends was all about. Ken likes to say I broke his heart. Ah, well. I went off to the University of Arizona and at the beginning of my sophomore year saw a very handsome young cowboy come into the Student Union. To my delight and surprise I realized I knew him! 'Ken Hale! My how you've changed!' I decided to give him another try and the rest is history.

Recently I received an e-mail account of an event that more than anything takes the measure of the man. One of Hale's sons, Caleb, is a medical student at Emory University. A fellow student wrote to tell about something that happened during an orientation meeting with a well-known and 'old-fashioned' neurological doctor. The doctor, to impress upon his students the need to think things through in order to learn them well, pulled out a copy of the *New York Times* and read from the obituary for Ken published there, singling out Ken's speaking Navajo to himself while sitting on a rock in the desert as an example of coming to terms with an extraordinarily complicated body of knowledge. The doctor told his students how impressed he was by this incredible linguist's ability to learn and to think. He had no idea this linguist's son was a member of the class he was lecturing to. The fellow student concluded her account by saying, 'It's pretty amazing that [Caleb's] father can have that kind of an impact on such a wide circle'.

No single obituary can do justice to Ken Hale. Even now we are learning how great and profound has been his impact on others, both as a linguist and as a human being. A number of obituaries have appeared extolling his life and his achievements. Most of these can be accessed through a website that his longtime colleague and friend, David Nash, maintains as a gesture of love and respect for Ken. The web address is: *http://www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/aust/hale/memoria m.html.*

The sum total of all of these obituaries, as extensive and as deeply felt as they are, will only begin to scratch the surface of the meaning of Ken Hale's life.

Hale died of cancer in his own home, surrounded by family and friends, at 11:20 AM, October 8, 2001. A memorial service was held on 1 November 2001 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at which participants commented in English, Hebrew, Hopi, Navajo, Wampanoag, and Warlpiri. The service was being held in these languages for the only man in the world who, had he lived, would have been able to understand all of them.

He leaves behind his wife, Sara Whitaker Hale, fours sons, Whit, Ian, and twins Caleb and Ezra, and his younger brother Steve and his family. [Samuel Jay Keyser, professor emeritus, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*.]*

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