WILLIAM G. MOULTON

William Gamwell Moulton, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and Germanic Languages and Literatures at Princeton University, passed away on June 2, 2000, in Exeter, New Hampshire, at the age of eighty-six. Professor Moulton served as a member of the executive committee of the Linguistic Society of America, as well as its vice president, and, in 1967, its president.

Moulton was born February 5, 1914, in Providence, RI. Like so many linguists of his generation, he came to the field by way of an interest in—and exceptional talent for—languages. As he himself put it in an autobiographical essay, '[i]n my day, no one *planned* to ''become a linguist'': we all stumbled into it, entering by the back door, because there was no front door' (Moulton 1980:60). Moulton's path toward linguistics was anything but stumbling. Already as a boy he was an assiduous student of Latin, French, and German. He began his undergraduate education at Princeton in 1931 where he pursued a dual degree in French and German, as well as a program in international relations. He was awarded a bachelor's degree with first-class honors in 1935. After graduating from Princeton, Moulton received a scholarship to study languages for a year at the University of Berlin. During that year he met Jenni Karding, whom he married on July 7, 1938.

In 1936 Moulton enrolled at Yale for graduate study, where he began work with Eduard Prokosch. In those days, Yale was clearly THE place to study linguistics as it emerged from traditional philology.

> It actually took me the better part of a year to discover 'linguistics' at Yale. It began with the Gothic course which I took from Prokosch. Then, somewhere during that first year, I discovered that there was at Yale a professor named Edward Sapir. Though he was on leave during my second year, I took his course in phonetics and phonemics in the fall of 1938—shortly before his death in early 1939. By this time I had also had the sense to take courses with Edgar H. Sturtevant (for Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin) and with Franklin B. Edgerton (for a year of Sanskrit). Prokosch died in an auto accident in the summer of 1938, but he was in a sense replaced by his son-in-law Hans Kurath who for two years came two days a week from Brown University to teach courses in Germanic linguistics. There may have been very few students of linguistics in Yale in those years, but we were hardly underprivileged. What a galaxy of stars: Prokosch, Sapir, Sturtevant, Edgerton and Kurath! (Moulton 1980:59)

In 1940 Leonard Bloomfield came to Yale and supervised Moulton as he completed the dissertation project begun under Prokosch. The following year, Moulton finished his dissertation, *Swiss German dialect and Romance patois*, which was published that same year as a supplement (17.4) to *Language* (Moulton 1941). This monograph, one of the very first to examine the structural effects of language contact in a rigorous way, advanced the frontiers of German dialectology and structural linguistics more generally by examining the role of Germanic-Romance contact in the historical development of sound systems in the Wallis/Valais region of Switzerland. It also established Moulton's reputation among German-speaking Swiss scholars as one of the pioneers in Swiss German dialectology, a reputation that endures today.

While Moulton's dissertation marked his entry into the fields of Swiss German dialectology and contact linguistics, he came to his topic by way of a straightforward historical linguistic question pertaining to Old High German vocalism.

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> One day in the spring of 1938 the late Professor Eduard Prokosch of Yale University suggested that I might find a topic for my doctoral dissertation in the general field of Old High German final vowels. In going through the work that has been done on this subject, the greatest stumbling block which I found was the assumption, made by many scholars, that certain final vowels must have been long in OHG because they still survive in a few modern dialects, especially in southwestern Switzerland. When I turned to these Swiss dialects, I became convinced that the full final vowels they show could not all have been long in OHG. Most of these vowels were surely short, and I began to suspect that they had been preserved because the dialects in which they occur have given up their inherited strong stress accent, and have taken on the weak stress accent of the neighboring Romance dialects. In order to test this belief, I began to look for other evidence of Romance influence. What I found seemed so important that it soon outweighed the OHG aspects of the problem, and came to make up the bulk of my investigation. (Moulton 1941:3)

At the crux of Moulton's analysis was the belief, grounded both in meticulously documented data from Germanic and Romance dialects and in sociohistorical information about the speakers of these dialects, that, contrary to received knowledge about language contact, a socially 'lower' (substrate) language (Valais Romance dialects) effected substantial structural change, in this case, phonological, in an 'upper' (superstrate) language (Wallis Swiss German). The mechanism for this change, Moulton posited, was the 'imperfect' acquisition of German by native Romance speakers (Moulton 1941:20). In more modern terms, this kind of contact-induced language change is describable, following van Coetsem 1988, as the IMPOSITION of a structural feature (here, a dominating stress accent) from a Romance source language onto a Germanic recipient language.

In terms of phonological theory, as demonstrated in his dissertation and in most of his publications, Moulton was unquestionably a Bloomfieldian structuralist and made a number of important contributions to structural phonological theory, drawing mainly on data from German and its dialects. Two particularly important articles bear mentioning here: 'Juncture in modern standard German' (Moulton 1947) and 'Dialect geography and the concept of phonological space' (Moulton 1962a). In works such as these, Moulton adhered rigorously to classic structuralist principles, including the strict separation of levels of structure (e.g. phonetic, phonemic, and morphological) as well as the tenet that individual units of structure (e.g. phonemes) were properly described not in isolation but as members of systems.

Moulton's presidential address at the annual meeting of the LSA in Chicago on December 28, 1967, which was published in *Language* the following year under the title 'Structural dialectology' (Moulton 1968), is an important document on Moulton's views on phonology and the various other linguistic subfields in which he worked. In this paper Moulton expresses how his dedication to rigorous phonological analysis was complemented by his personal passion for fieldwork as he experienced it in his investigations of Swiss and Dutch dialects. The catalyst for this 'Structural dialectology' was the seminal article, 'Is a structural dialectology possible?' (Weinreich 1954), by his friend and colleague at Columbia, Uriel Weinreich, who had just died that year (on March 30, 1967, one week to the day after Weinreich's forty-first birthday).

> At the same time that Weinreich was presumably writing his classic article on structural dialectology, I myself was enjoying a delightful Fulbright year (1953–54) in Holland. Trained as a Germanist, I had gone there in order to become acquainted with this important northwest corner of the Dutch-German linguistic area. My mentor was the late G. G. Kloeke, the Grand Old Man of Dutch dialectology. Because I had received my training at Yale under such great men as Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield, it was probably inevitable that I should approach the study of dialects from a structuralist point of view. Kloeke and I took many trips together into eastern Holland—'het oosten van ons land,' as he used to say—and the results were, to me, quite electrifying. I was particularly fascinated by the vowel systems of Dutch dialects. As we go from western Holland to eastern Holland, the number of monophthongs increases dramatically: first thirteen, then eighteen, then twenty-one. . . . I returned from my year in

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> Holland not only with a deep love for that country and its people and their language, but also with a deep resolve to do further work in structural dialectology. This resolve was strengthened when I then read Weinreich's article on the topic. (Moulton 1968:451–52)

Though Moulton did go on to publish one important article on Dutch phonology (Moulton 1962b), the bulk of his structural dialectological research, including the examples he cited in his 1967 presidential address, was on Swiss German data.[1]

Moulton's views, as expressed in Moulton 1968, on the importance of structural dialectology both for dialectology itself and for the larger field of linguistics, are illuminating. For him, as for other structuralist phonologists, the inherent variability of the phonetic signal made phonemic analysis utterly necessary in order for linguists to make meaningful statements about the synchrony and diachrony of sounds in human languages. An overemphasis on phonetic structure could, in Moulton's opinion, mislead investigators in a number of ways. For example, the 'same' sound in two dialects, say, [a:], might in fact be the realization of two different phonemes, /a:/ and /æ:/ (Moulton 1968:454). This underlying phonemic difference could, in turn, be of crucial importance in determining modern dialectal boundaries, with implications for the history of the dialects in question. In terms of general phonology, Moulton saw advantages of a structuralist approach on a number of questions, including the status of long vowels and diphthongs, which he analyzed as 'unit phonemes', single abstract units (Moulton 1968:457). Further, Moulton, citing Ladefoged 1960, underscored the fallibility of human investigators in identifying what actually occurs in the phonetic signal (Moulton 1968:461–63), though he curiously did not mention any role acoustic phonetic science might play in this regard.

These and Moulton's other remarks on structural dialectology highlight the field's importance as an improvement on earlier forms of linguistic research, such as that conducted by 'traditional' historical linguists and dialectologists. But Moulton delivered his presidential address in 1967, when both Chomskyan generative linguistics and Labovian sociolinguistics were on the ascendancy. Interestingly, he makes only one reference to generative phonology, with a hint of criticism, or at least skepticism.

> If we write carelessly about distinctive features, our readers will interpret us as believing that they represent fixed points within a multidimensional phonological space. We must make it clear that they refer not to fixed points but to whole areas that float rather freely within phonological space. To give another example, three areas may show the same number of vowel phonemes in the same configuration; but in one area the mid vowels may be close, in another they may be open. We must adjust our description of distinctive features so that they are compatible both with the structural identities and with the phonetic differences in three such areas. We must also adjust our description of distinctive features so that they will conform to the facts of life in other ways. As far as I know (and I may well be wrong), generative phonologists have not yet devised a system of distinctive features that will take care of more than four vowel heights. But German Switzerland has many points with five vowel heights, both among the short vowels and among the long vowels. (Moulton 1968:457–58)

Regarding sociolinguistics, Moulton (1968:461), not surprisingly for a progressive dialectologist, speaks approvingly of Labov's Martha's Vineyard and New York City studies (Labov 1963, 1966) and gives Labov credit for investigating speakers' expressed views on verbal behavior (1968:464).

[1] Moulton cites four main reasons for his decision to focus his research on Swiss German dialects: their considerable variety and vitality, the depth of their synchronic and diachronic documentation by Swiss linguists, his own dissertation research, and the profound ('world-record') complexity of Swiss German dialectal vocalism (Moulton 1968:452–53). To these reasons Moulton added the following: 'Finally, and quite unprofessionally, Switzerland is topographically superb: much as I might love Holland, I could not gainsay the fact that its mountains are no match for those of Switzerland' (453).

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Overall, it is clear that Moulton's passion for linguistics was firmly rooted in both his deep interest in phonological analysis and his abiding fascination with spoken language. In this regard, he was like a number of his American structuralist contemporaries who were trained in the 1930s and 1940s, including Charles F. Hockett, Einar Haugen, and J. Milton Cowan. For many of this generation of linguists, World War II played an important role in shaping their future professional interests. In particular, the charge many of these linguists received to 'apply', in a literal sense, insights from linguistic research to the teaching of modern, especially non-Western, languages had far-ranging effects not only on their individual careers but also on the field of language pedagogy in the US for generations to come.

After completing his dissertation in 1941, Moulton remained at Yale as an assistant professor of German until 1944. During that time he was trained as a civil affairs officer with a focus on teaching German to native English speakers, the result of which was *Spoken German*, which Moulton coauthored with his wife, Jenni (Moulton & Moulton 1944). In 1944 Moulton moved to Washington, DC, to take up work as a Language Supervisor responsible for government-sponsored schools teaching Japanese to military personnel. Later he oversaw English-language programs for German prisoners of war. After the war and leaving military service at the rank of captain, Moulton returned briefly to Yale, then accepted a faculty position in the Division of Modern Languages at Cornell in 1947, where he remained for the next thirteen years (Moulton 1980: 61–62).

Moulton came to Cornell at the invitation of J. Milton Cowan (Hockett 1995), founding director of the Division of Modern Languages (DML). Building on the successful wartime Army Specialized Training Program in Italian and Russian at Cornell, Cowan, with the support of the administration of Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences, restructured language study at the university by concentrating all modern language teaching into one administrative unit, the DML, leaving the traditional language departments to focus on literary studies. Writing about the Cornell language program in a 1952 *PMLA* article, Moulton discussed the administrative division between linguistics and language teaching on the one hand and literature on the other.

> Most alarming to some observers is the administrative separation of language and literature. This apparent gap is happily bridged at Cornell by close personal relations between members of the language and literature departments, just as is the equally alarming administrative gap between professors of foreign literatures and professors of English literature. Furthermore, in at least one language, German, the gap has been further closed by turning the post-proficiency reading course specifically into a transition from language to literature. (It is even taught by professors of literature, though how long their heavy teaching schedules will allow them to continue to do this is questionable at the moment.) At the same time, the separation of language and literature is not without advantages. In all honesty it must be admitted that the average professor of linguistics is more interested in language teaching, and more willing to spend time on it, than is the average professor of literature. The latter usually prefers to devote himself entirely to the teaching of literature; and that is precisely what the Cornell system allows him to do—to the envy of many of his colleagues elsewhere, one suspects. (Moulton 1952:44)

The linguists that Cowan and his colleague Gordon H. Fairbanks selected to build the DML were dedicated language teachers whose expertise was in specific language areas. Aside from Moulton for Germanic, these included Frederick B. Agard and Robert A. Hall, Jr. (Romance), John Echols (Indonesian), and Charles F. Hockett (Chinese) (Hockett 1995:346). It should be stressed that Moulton and his colleagues were devoted linguists who all came to the field by way of an abiding interest in languages; it should also be mentioned that each of these linguists was himself a gifted language learner. For them, there was a natural ecology between doing linguistics and teaching (and

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learning) language. In their view, a knowledge of how human languages work from a scientific perspective promoted more effective teaching and learning; at the same time, the insights linguists gained from their experience as language teachers enhanced the quality of their research.

From this marriage (or cohabitation) of linguistics and language teaching, as exemplified by Cornell's Division of Modern Languages, emerged the field of contrastive linguistics, at the heart of which was the American and European structuralist notion that an entity was best defined in negative terms, that is, as dissimilar from other entities (e.g. as 'dark' differs from 'light', so do 'obstruents' differ from 'sonorants', etc.). Contrastive linguistics was intended to benefit the general field by ensuring that linguists approached their object of study with a minimum of preconceived notions: the units of linguistic systems ought to be analyzed first in terms of the differential relations into which they enter with one another—within the system—and not in terms of their possible counterparts in other systems. A simple example would be analyzing Navajo grammar by referring to Navajo-internal structures, not according to the categories of the grammars of other languages, such as Latin or English. At the same time, contrastive linguistics promoted the comparison of languages with one another in order to identify structures that transcended particular languages, perhaps even as universals. Such cross-linguistic descriptive work was viewed as being directly beneficial to language learners, who would learn a second language more effectively when shown how a target language differed from their native language. And certainly this built on the received wisdom that a major benefit of foreign language study is making learners more sensitive to how their native language works, as well as human language more generally.

The three monographs Moulton published beyond his dissertation (Moulton & Moulton 1944, Moulton 1962c, 1970 [1966]) were all geared toward language learning on contrastive linguistic principles, though his primary professional interests always remained in phonology and dialectology. As he put it in his autobiographical essay, 'I wrote these books not because I was passionately interested in language teaching (I was not), but because language teaching was for many years my primary academic responsibility; and I like to see, and to try to show, how linguistic principles can be applied to it' (Moulton 1980:64). That caveat aside, Moulton's *Sounds of English and German* (1962c) and *Linguistic guide to language learning* (1970 [1966]) enjoyed widespread popularity when they appeared, and both may be consulted with profit today. The latter appeared revised in a German translation in 1972 (Moulton & Freudenstein 1972). It is interesting to consider the content of the *Linguistic guide to language learning* to see which 'linguistic principles' Moulton thought were useful to language learners.

There is no question that the language learner who would benefit the most from Moulton's *Guide* was someone like Moulton himself: a highly analytic individual interested in how a language was put together. The beginning of chapter three, 'How language works', for example, has a distinctly Bloomfieldian tone.

> In order to understand something of the nature of language and how it works, we can begin by examining a sample speech event and considering the elements of which it is composed. Let us assume that we have a speaker A and a hearer B; that A says something to B (just what he says is not important for our purposes); and that B understands him without difficulty. Here an act of communication has taken place. But *how* did it take place? What went on inside of A? How did the communication move from A to B? And then what went on inside of B? (Moulton 1970 [1966]:23)

Moulton goes on to identify eleven 'stages' of the communicative process, from the speaker's 'semantic encoding' of a message to the hearer's 'semantic decoding' of

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it. Intermediate stages include both 'grammatical' and 'phonological' encoding and decoding, as well as the physical transmission and reception of the speech signal (Moulton 1970 [1966]:23).

To be sure, this view of language in use as unidirectional from speaker to hearer, and where content and context are largely irrelevant ('just what [the speaker] says is not important for our purposes'), would raise the hackles of many an applied linguist/language pedagogue today. Indeed, the audiolingual method of foreign language instruction associated with Moulton's generation of linguist-language teachers has been viewed by many as inadequate to promoting 'communicative and cultural competence' in a language. Yet Moulton and his colleagues, as astute observers of naturally spoken language and polyglots themselves, recognized that 'the greatest language learners' are not 'parrots' (Moulton 1970 [1966]:3). Rather, in their applied linguistic work Moulton and others sought to appeal to the natural ability of adult language learners for critical analysis, regardless of whether these learners were linguists themselves or not.

In terms of his descriptions of language structure in the *Guide*, Moulton focuses on three main areas: sounds, sentences, and words, in that order (Moulton 1970 [1966]: Chs. 4, 5, 6). For each of these areas Moulton adeptly interweaves practical suggestions with sophisticated linguistic explanations in a writing style that is utterly readable. For example, in his chapter on pronunciation ('Sounds', ch. 4, pp. 49–64), he begins by contrasting the language-learning experiences of adults and children, something he does throughout the book, thereby highlighting the challenges of second language acquisition, but also appealing to the adult learner's ability for critical analysis. Then Moulton suggests that learners, in order to improve their pronunciation, let loose and imitate the accent of native speakers, both in the target language and in English.

> These two ways of learning a foreign pronunciation strike most adults as somehow 'unintellectual' and hence not desirable in the business of foreign language learning. This is a shame, since both methods are highly effective. Perhaps it is too much to ask a learner to make fun of his teacher's pronunciation of English, since this seems so impolite. Imitating the teacher's pronunciation of his *own* language, however, is not impolite at all; indeed, it is a compliment of the highest sort and will produce reactions of pleasure and gratitude. If the learner will only 'let himself go' and indulge in a little harmless theatrics, he can attain excellent results without recourse to the 'intellectual' devices which we are about to describe. (Moulton 1970 [1966]:50)

Moulton then proceeds to lay out the fundamentals of structural phonological analysis, his area of expertise, but in a way that is still accessible to the nonlinguist reader and interspersed with constant references to learnability, as well as basic facts about the segmental phonology and prosody of American English, the native language of the book's target audience.

As in the 'Sounds' chapter of his *Guide*, in his chapter 6 on morphology ('Words', pp. 87–99) Moulton strikes a balance between a thorough description of linguistic fundamentals and practical suggestions for learners. It is interesting, though, to consider his chapter on syntax ('Sentences', ch. 5, pp. 65–86). It can be recalled here that most of Moulton's research dealt with phonology and morphology. By 1970, when the second edition of Moulton's *Guide* appeared, the generative revolution was well underway. In his preface to the 1970 edition, Moulton states that advances in generative syntactic theory, in particular the crucial question of the relationship between underlying structure and meaning, motivated all the substantial revisions of his first edition.

> This new edition reflects, in a modest way, the continuing development of linguistic theory. Most of the first edition was written in 1964, when grammatical transformations were considered to be meaningful. Now, some five years later, it seems preferable to assume that most of the meaning of any sentence

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> is provided by its deep structure—which may or may not be part of the semantic component of language. The function of transformational rules is then largely one of interrelating deep structure (representing the way we understand sentences) with surface structure (representing the way we say sentences). (Moulton 1970 [1966]:xii)

In his chapter on syntax Moulton deftly lays out a number of basic concepts derived from both structuralist and generative work, including IMMEDIATE CONSTITUENT ANALYSIS, an approach to the analysis of syntactic structure already found in Bloomfield's *Language* (Bloomfield 1933; see Graffi 2001:185) and whose emphasis on hierarchy and binary structure was forward-looking in the pregenerative era. Overall, despite his equation of 'deep structure' with meaning (which was a widely held notion in the late 1960s), Moulton does an excellent job in this chapter of not confusing syntactic and semantic structure, thereby underscoring the autonomy of these two areas of language. He also does not shy away from stressing the discretely combinatorial character of human language, as well as the universality of recursion (e.g. Moulton 1970 [1966]:83–84).

Moulton's *Linguistic guide to language learning* thus gives us a good impression of him as both a passionate linguist and a somewhat reluctant (though no less dedicated) language teacher. Moulton spent thirteen years on the faculty of the Division of Modern Languages at Cornell, from 1947 to 1960,[2] at which point he was recruited by Princeton, his undergraduate alma mater, to found a graduate program in linguistics. Such a program was created in 1962, and Moulton chaired it until his retirement in June 1979 (Curschmann & Ziolkowski 2001). Speaking of this move, Moulton wrote:

> In 1960 I was invited to come to Princeton. The invitation was interesting: my primary task would be to establish and then administer an interdepartmental Program in Linguistics at the graduate level. (Let the record show that it was a classicist—the late, great Whitney D. ['Mike'] Oates—who was the prime mover behind this program.) The teaching would also be interesting: I would no longer manage undergraduate language courses (I felt that I had already done my share of this), and I would have more opportunity to teach courses in general linguistics. Besides, the weather would be better. (Oh, those interminable Upper New York State winters!) And so, after agonizing endlessly over the decision, I left Cornell—not without regrets—and went to Princeton. (Moulton 1980:64)

At both Cornell and Princeton, Moulton was highly respected—and with deep affection—by his many students. He was remembered as the model of a genteel New Englander, yet very accessible both in the classroom and outside of it. Much in the style of his *Guide*, in lectures Moulton would illustrate explanations of linguistic concepts with anecdotes, often humorous, from his lifelong experience with language. Jack Hall (p.c.), a graduate student of Moulton's in the 1960s and now at the University of Houston, recalled the following story from Moulton's classroom:

> In Germanic linguistics classes he liked to tell a supposedly true funny story about an older Germanic linguist, I've forgotten who, but I think somebody he studied under at Yale. This was during WWII days. Some official at Yale said to him: 'Somebody said English is just a German dialect. Is that true?' (Implication being it would be unpatriotic to consider English a German dialect.) The professor replied: 'Oh, no, it's not a German dialect, it's a *low* German dialect.' I think Moulton said the man was fired on the spot, but it got a good laugh from us students.

Another of Moulton's students, Herbert L. Kufner, who completed his Ph.D. under Moulton's supervision in 1956 at Cornell and, in a sense, succeeded him as linguist-language supervisor in German in the DML (later, the Department of Modern Languages

[2] Moulton was hired by Cornell at the rank of associate professor, and was promoted to full professor there in 1949.

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and Linguistics),[3] remembered his Doktorvater as a scholar who combined natural charisma with humility, but also as a person with a singular gift for acquiring languages with ease. Kufner recounted the story of Moulton's participation at a conference on Swiss German dialectology. After hearing Moulton present examples from two major dialects, Zurich German and Bernese German, two linguists who happened to be native speakers of these dialects argued with one another over where Moulton was from, with each claiming him as one of their own.

Well into retirement, Moulton remained a prolific researcher, eventually producing upward of seventy-five articles, as well as his four books. He was the recipient of three prestigious fellowships: from the Fulbright Program (Netherlands, 1953–54), the American Council of Learned Societies (Switzerland, 1958–59), and the Guggenheim Foundation (Switzerland, 1964–65). Moulton was awarded the Goethe Gold Medal from the Goethe-Institut in Munich in 1970, the Wilber Lucius Cross Medal from Yale in 1976, and the Max Geilinger Prize for exceptional contributions to the study of Swiss German in 1982. In addition to serving as president of the LSA in 1967, he received honorary doctorates from Middlebury College (1974) and the University of Munich (1984).

It is appropriate to conclude these remarks on the life and career of William Gamwell Moulton with his own words at the close of his autobiographical essay (Moulton 1980: 65).

> Though all linguists must somehow love languages, many of them seem uninterested in speaking languages. I love to. I speak grocery store Italian. I speak what might be called 'social French.' I apparently speak German like a German; and though this has been of great professional benefit to me, at least once it almost got me into trouble. (A guard thought I was German.) It is much more fun, however, to speak the languages of the 'small' countries. I speak passable Dutch, and they seem to love me for it. But I am proudest of my Swiss German, where I speak badly something vaguely approaching the Zurich city variety. No matter, this amazes the natives, and it has brought me much pleasure and many advantages.
>
> Though my family sometimes disagree for financial reasons, I myself have never regretted that decision made back in 1935, in the depth of the depression. Except for my abominable 'leadership qualities,' I have had a happy and rewarding professional life.

[MARK L. LOUDEN, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*]*

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[3] Kufner's 1962 monograph was the grammatical counterpart of Moulton's *Sounds of English and German*, which appeared in the same year and in the same series (Moulton 1962c).

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