HARRY HOIJER

Harry Hoijer—linguist, anthropologist, scholar, teacher, writer, husband, father, humanist—was born in Chicago on September 6, 1904, and died in Los Angeles on March 4, 1976. Harry was my teacher, colleague, and friend. The facts of his life can be stated by anyone writing about him; but the interpretation of these facts must of necessity be idiosyncratic, reflecting the views of the writer and the relationship with him. Yet I believe that anyone who ever knew him—or, indeed, anyone who knows his work—will agree that the world of linguistics and the world at large were changed for the better because Harry Hoijer lived for almost seventy-two years.

Like every individual, Harry Hoijer was shaped by events and people just as he shaped and influenced them. Born to Swedish immigrant parents, the son of a skilled cabinetmaker, he developed and maintained a deep respect for those who worked with their hands. His own intellectual curiosity moved him to enter the University of Chicago, where he received his B.A. degree in 1927 in engineering and mathematics, the study of which may have left its stamp in the rigor and meticulousness of his later work. It was fortunate for anthropology and linguistics that in his senior year he roomed with Cornelius Osgood, who convinced him to continue as a graduate student in anthropology; this led to an M.A. in 1929 and a Ph.D. in 1931, and to his first position as an instructor in anthropology at the University of Chicago.

His marriage in 1927 to Dorothy Jared, who was later to become a biochemist, and the birth of his three children, Charlotte, Peter, and Susan, undoubtedly reinforced his basic belief in and support of the equality of women, long before 'affirmative action' achieved popular support. He was in at least one way a typical 'linguistic father', playing games with his children that only a linguist could invent. His students heard him tell of a game which he played with Charlotte when she was two years old, in which he would say a noun in either the singular or plural form, and she would have to respond with the other member of the pair. Thus he might say *cats*, and she would answer *cat*—or *dog*, to which she would respond *dogs*. During one of these game sessions he said *ox*, and she answered [ak]. In the midst of the students' laughter, Hoijer, with a straight face, would use this 'mistake' to reveal some of the characteristics of human language. I am sure that many of his students besides myself have used this game to help their students grasp basic linguistic concepts.

During his years at the University of Chicago, Hoijer worked with Edward Sapir, a relationship which profoundly influenced Hoijer's life, leading to his work as a linguist and to his becoming the greatest Athapaskanist of his day. Like Sapir, Hoijer devoted many years to field work, and combined his interest in language description with a concern for theoretical questions and the intimate relationship between language and culture. His earliest field work on Tonkawa, a non-Athapaskan language, led to his first publication in 1933, and to the later publication in 1972 of *Tonkawa texts*. This work was of particular importance because of

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the later extinction of the Tonkawa people. Hoijer was not only Sapir's student, but became his closest colleague and collaborator. After Sapir's death, Hoijer, as his literary executor, devoted many years to Sapir's Athapaskan data and notes, particularly on Navajo, culminating in the publication of the *Navajo lexicon* in 1974. *Navajo texts*, co-authored with Sapir, had been published in 1942.

Hoijer's work on American Indian languages, diachronic and synchronic, continued after he joined the faculty of the Anthropology Department at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1940, where he remained for the rest of his life. At UCLA he developed close personal and academic ties with Ralph Beals, leading to their co-authorship of *An introduction to anthropology*, a textbook which was to influence thousands of students in the years that followed.

There was no period in his academic life when Hoijer did not devote himself to his work, publishing extensively on the Southern Athapaskan languages, methodology in language classification, phonology, morphology, comparative linguistics, lexicostatistics, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, semantics, text analysis, the history of linguistics, and general linguistic theory, in addition to his publications in cultural anthropology. In the period when a strictly behaviorist and operationalist philosophy dominated American linguistics, constraining the linguist to discount any data beyond the 'physical' record, Hoijer delivered a paper at the 8th International Congress of Linguists on the importance of 'Native reaction as a criterion in linguistic analysis'. This paper, reminiscent of Sapir's views on 'psychological reality', reveals Hoijer's unwillingness to bow to any sacred cows. Furthermore, in this period when 'meaning' was considered a forbidden aspect of language, Hoijer, like Jakobson, believed that 'language without meaning is meaningless', and wrote on the semantics of Navajo.

Hoijer's continued productivity was astounding; even as he wrote and worked and published, he found time to contribute to the building of both the Department of Anthropology and to the founding of the Graduate Program in Linguistics at UCLA. He was the Chairman of the Anthropology Department in 1942–43 and 1948–52, and the chairman of the Linguistics Program from 1959 to 1963. During World War II, in addition to his university teaching he taught in the Army Specialized Training Programs. He also served actively on numerous committees of the UCLA Academic Senate. It is no wonder that in 1957 he was named the outstanding faculty member by the Student Yearbook, and in 1958 was appointed Faculty Research Lecturer, the highest honor which a faculty member at UCLA can achieve.

Hoijer's service to the University was more than matched by his service to the professional community. His work as a leading anthropologist was recognized by the American Anthropological Association when he was elected Vice-President in 1949, a member of the Executive Board in 1953–56, and President in 1958. In 1951 he served as Vice-President of the Linguistic Society of America, and was elected its President in 1959. Hoijer also undertook the responsibility of editing the 'Notes and reviews' section of the *International Journal of American Linguistics* for many years, and served as Associate Editor of *IJAL* and the *American Anthropologist*.

Hoijer was concerned about the 'relevance' of anthropology and linguistics before the question was raised in the 1960's. He was no ivory-tower linguist. He

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believed that knowledge should serve the best interests of humanity. Thus, despite his desire to be left to his scholarly pursuits, he felt it his duty to serve as a consultant to the UNESCO Commission on Language and Mentality, and from 1950 until 1969 represented the American Council of Learned Societies on the Committee on Research in American Indian Languages, also serving as Chairman of the Committee. An even better indication of his strong belief that a scholar cannot stand aloof from the society in which he lives and works was his courageous role during the height of the hysteria against Mexican-Americans in the so-called zoot-suit riots of the 1940's. In this period a number of young Chicanos were arrested for murder. In the infamous trial which came to be known as the Sleepy Lagoon murder case, Hoijer introduced a statement for the defense against the unscientific racist views which the prosecution put forth—that the defendants had inherited a blood lust from their Aztec ancestors. His scholarly but angry statement against racism won him enemies, but also many admirers. Hoijer's courage in this hysterical period, and the scholarship which he displayed in his testimony, had a great influence on many young people at that time. Many of us who grew up in the period of the depression and the rise of fascism had developed a cynical attitude toward academic scholars. Hoijer's testimony taught us that one needed knowledge in the fight for one's beliefs, and that this knowledge could be used to help right the wrongs of society.

In this sense Hoijer was a teacher to thousands of young people who never sat in his classroom—including, at that time, myself. It is no wonder, then, that years later, I entered my first linguistics course with great anticipation, since the professor was the man I had learned to admire and respect so many years before. I found in that class that Hoijer was not only a courageous and dedicated human being, but also a truly distinguished academic teacher.

Hoijer was basically a shy individual. But, as in the Sleepy Lagoon case, he put aside his own desire for privacy in order to enter the fight against the infamous loyalty oath at the University of California, and he continued to fight all abuses of academic freedom. Like hundreds of others, he became a target for the witch-hunters, and was subpoenaed by the California Committee on Un-American Activities during the McCarthy period. But the flagrant attack on this great man did not extinguish the basic principles by which he lived his life and by which he continued his scholarly pursuits.

A major requirement for real scholarship is a concern for truth. According to one philosopher of science,[1] this requires character, sincerity, and modesty: 'It requires character to seek the truth even when we have reason to fear that it will not be to our liking. It requires sincerity to accept the truth when this truth happens to contradict all that we have previously professed. Finally, it requires modesty to recognize that man cannot, by his inner vision alone, attain to truth and that he must stoop to experiment.' Hoijer possessed all these characteristics. He didn't lecture on such questions—he demonstrated them by the way he lived, and he demanded that his students adhere to them.

But Hoijer did lecture, in the best sense of the word. He was eloquent, articulate, organized, knowledgeable, and humorous. He made difficult concepts under-

[1] A. D'Abro, *The rise of the new physics*, 1.7–8 (New York: Dover, 1952).

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standable, and he brought an excitement of discovery to each class. I and countless other students became linguists because Hoijer made linguistics the most exciting subject imaginable.

It was not only in the classroom that Hoijer taught. He liked nothing better than to sit with a student in his office, working over data, arguing over analysis, helping the student to work through the complexities of the Navajo verb to emerge with an elegant solution. It was not the elegance, however, which was most important, but the fact that each such analysis brought us closer to understanding the magnificence of human language and the culture which each language reflected. He was challenging, and he was demanding.

In his lifetime Harry Hoijer was respected and admired as a scholar and linguist and loved as a human being. His work will remain; and what he stood for will continue to influence all of us, old and young.

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