VICTORIA A. FROMKIN

Vicki Fromkin was the mother of all linguists. She nurtured her chosen field zealously, helping its practitioners from their first glimpse of what it could offer to the advanced levels of her own research on language and the brain. She was known to literally millions of people through her book *An introduction to language*, which has sold over three-quarters of a million copies and has been translated into many languages, including Portuguese, Japanese, Swedish, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Dutch, and even into Australian English. Probably no other linguistics book has had such success. The book arose from a course, Linguistics 1, that she developed and taught for many years. (Robert Rodman, her first co-author, was her teaching assistant in one of the earlier versions of this course. He is currently a professor of computer science at North Carolina State University.) Whenever Vicki taught Linguistics 1 it bulged over the class limit of four hundred students. Her friendly style and quick wit kept students enthralled.

It is interesting to consider why *An introduction to language* (1st edn., 1974; 7th edn., Fromkin et al. 2002) is such a successful book. It is not because it lacks competitors. Many people have tried unsuccessfully to replace it. Nor does the glib answer—it's because of the cartoons—explain it. Instructors, not fun-seeking students, choose books for a given course. Instructors are swayed by content and good explanations, not by dashes of humor. The real strength of the book lies in its clarity and the wide range of topics that are covered, from careful phonological discussion to insightful comments on language and the brain. No doubt the cartoons are valuable, showing how studying language can be fun. The same is true for the quotations from authors such as Lewis Carroll, Jonathan Swift, and George Bernard Shaw, which link the study of language to a wider world. These lighthearted quotations are counterbalanced by serious citations from people such as Chomsky and Darwin, which lend the weight of authority. As a result, *An introduction to language* is a wonderful blend of amusement and knowledge. Many of today's linguists had their interest in the field piqued by an introductory course using this text.

Vicki was well aware that she lacked the knowledge to write by herself a successor to *An introduction to language*. But, with her constant desire to help train better linguists, she very much wanted to provide upper division and beginning graduate classes with a more substantial book. Her zeal for the field led her to organize 'the gang of 12', herself and eleven other UCLA linguists, to write a book that she edited and rewrote with a passion. She was determined to produce an advanced linguistics text that treated the complex issues of linguistics in a straightforward, easy to understand manner. She put a great deal of effort into getting a unified text, bullying and cajoling her co-authors in a way that some of them found heavy-handed. The result, *Linguistics: An introduction to linguistic theory*, makes the latest developments in theoretical linguistics available to those with a deeper interest in the field. It is difficult for an advanced level book to be seen as capturing all aspects of the current theory, but insofar as this book achieves this end, Vicki achieved her goal of taking her field one step further.

She also advanced the field in her own, specialized, research. She began as a phonetician, developing new techniques of electromyography for a dissertation on the move-

https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2003.0248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ments of the lips in speech (Fromkin 1965). Her measurements of the lip gestures in American English are still cited. These studies of muscles in action led her to become interested in the control mechanisms underlying speech. Realizing that a superb window into the mind was available through the study of speech errors, she began her extensive collection of slips of the tongue, observing the kinds of mistakes that occur in the control of speech (see Fromkin 1980). Her dedication to this work was sometimes rather disconcerting. You could be talking to her about anything, and in the middle of the conversation she would whip out a notebook and write down an error you'd just made. She collected several thousand errors, combining her own observations with errors reported by others, and organized them into a database of more than ten thousand slips of the tongue.

On the basis of the evidence provided by this database she proposed a theory of speech production in which lexical items were stored in the brain in multiple ways. She argued that some data showed that phonological features were part of the lexical storage, in that features such as voicing and nasality acted independently in the production of errors. For example, in the pronunciation of *cedars of Lebanon* as *cedars of Lemadon*, the single feature [nasal] had transposed values in the second and third consonants in *Lebanon*. (Others have argued that the rareness of such switches in the database could be taken as counterevidence, showing that whole segments are the real units, with this particular error being simply a chance confusion.) On firmer ground, she provided evidence for other units in speech production (or *preach seduction*, as she would mischievously quote from another error). She found that the majority of phonological errors involved phoneme-sized units in word- or syllable-initial position, but errors such as *knife light* for *night life* were not uncommon.

Her data also showed that words are stored so that similar semantic classes belong together. As a result, *You have too many irons in the fire* might come out as *You have too many irons in the smoke*, but not as *you have too many irons in the coat*. She found that morphologically complex words were stored in pieces so that, when a word switch occurred, the added morphemes might remain, as in *easily enough* becoming *easy enoughly*. Similarly the syntax of a sentence must be separately controlled in that sentences such as *I want to get a check cashed* might come out as *I want to get a cash checked*, but not as *I want to get a cashed check*. Even though the latter sentence is less semantically anomalous, producing it would have required a change in the syntax. In her model, speakers first determine the meaning that they wish to produce, then select a syntactic structure with an intonation contour. The content words are inserted into this structure, and the affixes and function words adjusted appropriately. Finally the phonetic segments are specified. Her overview of this model of speech production is given in Fromkin 1983.

Speech errors were not the only window into the mind that Vicki used. She became involved early in the study of 'Genie', a girl of thirteen who was found in 1970 after she had been isolated in a small room and had not been spoken to by her parents since infancy. Vicki supervised Susie Curtiss, currently a professor of linguistics at UCLA, who wrote her dissertation on Genie's meager linguistic abilities. Vicki also worked with aphasic patients, observing the areas of the brain in which different linguistic functions failed, work that led to her becoming chair of the board of governors of the Academy of Aphasia. She was the first nonmedical person to achieve this status.

The extensive list of publications in the festschrift in honor of Vicki's sixty-fifth birthday (Hyman & Li 1988) shows the breadth of her work up till 1987. Equally, as the editors point out, the extensive list of contributors to the festschrift shows the wide

https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2003.0248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

range of scholars whose careers and lives she has touched. Some of her later publications are listed on the section of the linguistics department's web site devoted to her at http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/fromkin/fromkin.htm, which also includes a number of obituaries.

Vicki came into the field of linguistics near the beginning of the Chomskyan revolution. Although she did not contribute to Chomsky's main interest, the development of linguistic, notably syntactic, theory, she certainly helped sharpen notions of competence and performance, and the notion of language as an organ of the mind. In one of her last papers (Fromkin 1997) she summarized evidence from many different areas, including aphasia, event-related potentials (ERPs), specific language impairments (SLI) in children, asymmetry of abilities as shown by linguistic 'savants', sign language, and disorders such as prosopagnosia and visual agnosia. She claimed that all these phenomena support the view that the human language ability is autonomous and independent of other cognitive abilities with which it interacts in use.

Vicki's professional career mirrored her view of herself as a linguist and educator. She served the University of California at all levels, from undergraduate at Berkeley in the forties, graduate student at UCLA in the sixties, faculty member in the late sixties and onwards, to dean and vice-chancellor in the seventies and eighties, before returning in the nineties to research and teaching in linguistics. She became a graduate student in the UCLA Department of Linguistics somewhat late in life, at age thirty-nine in 1962. (Her first degree was in economics from UC Berkeley in 1944.) Those of us who tried to teach her found it a memorable, somewhat daunting, experience. Her inquiring, logical mind never let us get away with anything. The classroom was never quiet when she was a student. She sought the truth and would not take any watered down versions. She received her Ph.D. in 1965, after three years of intensive work, an achievement that set the style of her rapid progress. In 1974, twelve years after entering the department as a graduate student, she became chair, a feat that is almost certainly unequaled in any major linguistics department. Later it looked as if she might be leaving linguistics entirely to become an administrator. Shortly after leaving the chair of the department she became dean of the graduate division, becoming vice-chancellor for graduate programs from 1979 to 1989, the first woman in the UC system to hold that rank. She was also the first woman president of the Association of Graduate Schools in the American Association of Universities.

While serving as a university administrator, Vicki also served her profession. She was a prominent LSA member, serving on many committees, including the Executive Committee (1974–1976). She was elected secretary-treasurer from 1979 to 1983, vice-president in 1984, and president in 1985. None of this stopped her from being a research scholar, publishing many papers, and supervising several Ph.D. dissertations. When she resigned from being an administrator she returned to being a regular member of the department, keeping up with her research interests and still pushing hard to make sure that the UCLA Department of Linguistics remained one the leading departments in the world. However, she also retained her interest in general university affairs. As an emerita professor she continued to serve on major academic senate committees such as the planning and budget committee and was elected to serve as a member of the UCLA Academic Senate executive board until 2001. Throughout her academic life, both as an administrator and as a faculty member, she cared for students, rejoicing in their successes, sympathizing with their problems, helping them organize their lives, lending them money, and just being there for them.

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She received many accolades from her peers, including a Distinguished Teaching award from UCLA. She was a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and became one of the select group of linguists in the National Academy of Science. But perhaps the most important thing about Vicki is that, over and above all this, she was a great human being. A political activist in her early years, she worked all her life for social justice.

She was born Victoria Alexandra Landish on 16 May 1923 in Passaic, New Jersey, and died on 19 January 2000 in Los Angeles. She was married to Jack Fromkin for more than fifty years, and had one son, Mark, who was tragically killed in an automobile accident when he was just sixteen. She was a wonderful contributor to the whole field of linguistics, to the University of California, and to the lives of all who knew her.
[Peter Ladefoged, *University of California Los Angeles*]

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https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2003.0248 Published online by Cambridge University Press