ELLEN F. PRINCE

Ellen F. Prince, president of the Linguistic Society of America in 2008 and a major figure in the fields of discourse, pragmatics, and information structure, died peacefully in her home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 24, 2010, of lung cancer. She was sixty-six. At the time of her death, Ellen was Professor Emeritus (she would have eschewed the title 'Emerita') of Linguistics, with a secondary appointment in the Department of Computer and Information Science, at the University of Pennsylvania, where she had been a faculty member from 1974 until her retirement in 2005.

Ellen was born Ellen Deanna Friedman on February 29, 1944, in the Flatbush[1] neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, the only child of Irving and Jeannette (née Rothkopf) Friedman. As a leap day baby, she enjoyed only sixteen birthdays in her sixty-six years, the last being on February 29, 2008, on which date friends gathered to celebrate her 'Sweet Sixteen'. Growing up in Brooklyn, she attended Walt Whitman Junior High School for only two years, having skipped eighth grade, and Erasmus Hall High School for four years. In 1960, she enrolled in Brooklyn College, where she received a B.A. in French in 1964. Always interested in language, she completed an M.A. thesis in 1967 also at Brooklyn College, translating and commenting on an Anglo-Norman manuscript under the supervision of Wallace Lipton, while at the same time studying linguistics at New York University in 1966–67. In the fall of 1967 she enrolled in the Linguistics Ph.D. program at the University of Pennsylvania, where her husband Gerald Prince (whom she met in a French poetry class at Brooklyn College and married on June 25, 1967) had been hired as an Instructor of French and where he is currently Professor of Romance Languages.

At Penn, she studied under Zellig Harris, the founder of its linguistics department and inventor of transformational grammar. In 1974, she completed her dissertation, which provided a formal analysis of tense and aspect within a Harrisian framework, and was hired at Penn as an Assistant Professor of Linguistics. She soon found herself growing disenchanted with the limitations of sentence-level syntax; at the same time, she was becoming increasingly fascinated with larger units of analysis, specifically the use of language in context and the pragmatic principles that govern the distribution of sentences in discourse.

Ellen was inspired by the work of Susumu Kuno, who impressed upon her 'the fact that the form of an utterance may well have something to do with the communicative intentions of the speaker' (Prince 1988a:164, acknowledgment note). An early work of Ellen's—'A comparison of WH-clefts and *it*-clefts in discourse' (1978)—showed this influence to good effect. At the time, these two constructions were viewed as interchangeable. Ellen showed that in fact their discourse functions and constraints are quite different; while the presupposed portion of WH-clefts expresses propositions assumed by the speaker to be in the conscious mind of their addressee, the same is not true of *it*-clefts, one subvariety of which actually uses the presupposed part to introduce new information to the addressee, an instance of what David Lewis was later to dub 'accommodation'.

[1] From Dutch *vlacke bos* 'flat woodland', anglicized to *Flatbush*.

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This paper exemplifies an important feature of Ellen's work, which is her reliance on naturally occurring data. This was before the ready availability of large computerized corpora; almost all of the examples in her paper had been painstakingly collected by hand, either from books and newspapers or, occasionally, from conversations. Well before Google, much less electronic databases, Ellen was ready to enrich her own work or that of colleagues with the inclusion of a deftly selected, fully contextualized example captured in the wild and preserved on a handy index card. Ellen stressed that we human linguists are not very good at constructing or evaluating examples that require specific discourse conditions. Another paper of Ellen's—'On the inferencing of indefinite-*this* NPs' (1981c)—shows her resourcefulness in finding naturally occurring spoken data. The bulk of the examples in this paper come from Studs Terkel's 1974 book *Working*, which contains extensive recorded interviews with people talking about their experiences at work. Indefinite *this* turns out to be very common in ordinary speech, but being nonstandard and thus somewhat stigmatized, it had been almost universally ignored. Ellen was able to mine Terkel's book and bring to light the characteristics of this necessarily specific determiner, including its forward-looking topic-introducing function within discourse, while also calling into question some prominent contemporary views on presupposition.

This emphasis on the use of naturally occurring data pervaded, and indeed made possible, Ellen's extensive work in information structure and the correlation between syntactic form and discourse function. In one important paper (Prince 1986), she investigates a broad range of syntactic constructions and, using naturally occurring data (of course), finds a strong correlation between the property of containing a syntactic gap and the marking of an open proposition as shared between speaker and hearer.

In another early influential paper entitled 'Toward a taxonomy of given–new information' (1981a), she sorts out and clarifies the different ways in which other researchers use terms like 'given' and 'new' to describe (assumptions about) information. She distinguishes three types of givenness—predictability/recoverability, saliency, and so-called 'shared knowledge', a term she proceeds to discard on the grounds that only an omniscient observer could know what is and is not shared. She proposes instead the more accurate 'assumed familiarity' as an umbrella term for what had previously been called 'givenness'. The paper distinguishes the ways in which entities may be alluded to depending on assumptions by the speaker about the knowledge state of the addressee. It establishes seven categories, from NPs used to introduce entities unrelated to any others assumed to be known to the addressee, to those used to refer to the speaker and addressee themselves.[2] Also in this paper, Ellen examines two very different texts, an informal conversation and a paragraph from a textbook, and finds marked differences in the proportions of the different NP types, but also some commonalities—for example, the tendency for subject NPs to represent entities assumed to be more familiar. One particularly surprising result from this paper is the demonstration that it is spoken language that transparently reflects the scale of assumed familiarity and that written texts are far more opaque.

This work is continued and revised in Ellen's 1992 paper 'The ZPG letter: Subjects, definiteness, and information-status', which describes three categories of old vs. new information—first briefly discussing focus-presupposition constructions (building on her work in Prince 1986), and then introducing the cross-classification between dis-

[2] Two of the most interesting of these categories involve what Ellen called 'inferrables', using a spelling that is not sanctioned by any ordinary English dictionary, but which thanks to her may well become standard.

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course-new and -old entities, on the one hand, and hearer-new and -old entities, on the other. This pair of distinctions constitutes a significant streamlining of the categories introduced in Prince 1981a, resulting in a four-celled matrix of information statuses that has been shown in subsequent research to account for a great many constraints on the use of noncanonical syntactic constructions (what Prince 1985 called 'fancy syntax').

Two other papers making major contributions to pragmatic theory are Prince 1976, an early demonstration of the use of crosslinguistic data and the relevance of hedging and politeness to the operation of grammatical rules, and Prince 1983, a widely cited unpublication showing how Grice's framework for deriving implicatures from the exploitation of conversational maxims had been widely misunderstood. This latter paper, 'Grice and universality', elegantly reveals the flaws in the case for viewing the Gricean pragmatic paradigm as culture-specific by demonstrating how natural language communication would have to work (or rather not work) in the absence of the maxims and implicatures; it has long been required reading in pragmatics courses despite the fact that it was denied publication on ideological grounds by the one journal she submitted it to (as a reply to an earlier article therein).

Any linguist who persisted in conflating all instances of leftward movement of constituents under the rubric 'topicalization' was disabused of this view by Prince 1981b, which artfully distinguishes the subtly variegated discourse properties of topicalization, focus movement, and Yiddish movement, the last construction illustrated by the classic exchange in 1.

(1) A: Hello, Mrs. Goldberg. How's everything? How's your son?
B: Oy, don't ask. A sports car he wants—that's all I was missing!

Here, the open proposition *he wants X* is assumed to allude to a familiar (or plausibly inferrable) issue, but is neither salient nor previously evoked. In Yiddish movement, negative polarity items can be extracted beyond their licenser, with the resultant utterance—*A finger he wouldn't lift!*—characteristically accompanied, in Ellen's words, by a dorsal display of the hand. The fact that each of the three discourse functions can be expressed with the same surface syntax, albeit with different prosodic contours, and the fact that these discourse functions can also be expressed with different syntactic constructions (e.g. clefts), underlines the complex many-to-many relations between syntax and discourse that Ellen's work so insightfully explored. This point is brought out nicely in another paper, Prince 1984, which focuses on the distinctions between topicalization and left dislocation (LD) while also illuminating the trichotomy of functions conflated in the latter form: LD1 (serving to simplify processing), LD2 (serving to mark a salient partially ordered set relation), and LD3 (serving to preempt or amnesty island violations).

Yiddish played a significant part in Ellen's research beginning with her insights concerning Yiddish movement in Prince 1981b, discussed above. Ellen later got serious about her heritage language, returning to school in 1985 to obtain an Intermediate Certificate in Yiddish from Columbia University and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Over the next sixteen years, a flurry of articles that had 'Yiddish' in the title—and others that dealt with Yiddish—appeared, averaging more than one per year.

Many of these papers capitalize on the pliability of Yiddish syntax for what it can reveal about the pragmatic effects of syntactic form. Prince 1993, for example, explores the pragmatics of a construction in which a dummy pronoun, *es* 'it', fills the initial position in a clause and therefore requires the subject to be postposed, given the verb-second nature of Yiddish. By careful analysis of a large text, Ellen demonstrates that the postposed subject cannot refer to an entity that has already been evoked. Prince 1999

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explores, from the vantage point of centering theory, the pragmatic effects of leftmost position of a nonsubject coupled with that constituent's absence from its normal position. Here Ellen makes the same three-way distinction that she made in 1981b between topicalization (so-called), focus movement, and Yiddish movement, adding an independent discussion of the similar syntactic form within Yiddish itself. She shows that in Yiddish the form functions in two pragmatically distinguishable ways that are similar to, but more general than, the functions of native English topicalization and focus movement. Ellen demonstrates that Yiddish movement in English is like focus movement in Yiddish, having a use that resembles focus movement in English, but with weaker discourse constraints.

Ellen's work on Yiddish took her into linguistic realms that she otherwise might not have entered: lexicalism (Davis & Prince 1986), the borrowing of forms, meanings, and functions in language contact situations, and dialect shift. She was a pioneer in the field of historical pragmatics, making the discovery that borrowing is easiest when what is borrowed is a Saussurean two-part sign: a combination of form and function. Since Max Weinreich's early work on the history of Yiddish (eventually published as Weinreich 1973), Yiddish has been widely viewed as a special kind of language, a FUSION LANGUAGE without parallel among 'ordinary' languages. But in Prince 2001, Ellen insists that Yiddish is governed by the same forces that apply to other languages. That article makes other scientifically valid points that are also heresies to many Yiddishists, for example, that Yiddish did not begin with partial speakers of Germanic, that Old Yiddish was a sister language of Middle High German, and that the boundary between Old Yiddish and Middle High German is unclear.

Ellen's interests in Yiddish dialects led her in the early 1980s to discover the work of the Yiddish folksinger Sarah Gorby (born in Russia around the turn of the century in an area that later became a part of Romania). Ellen became fascinated both with Gorby's work and with the shifts in her dialect as represented in her songs recorded over a period of forty years (from about 1940 until 1979). She meticulously transcribed the pronunciation of vowels from a large corpus of recordings and used this to document the factors influencing dialect shift over the course of one individual's lifetime (Prince 1987). Ellen's involvement with Gorby's music transcended her scholarly interest in the dialect shift—she loved her singing and collected as many recordings of her as she could. She tracked down and made contact with Gorby's remaining family (Gorby herself died in 1980), and established a foundation dedicated to the preservation of Gorby's music.

Ellen's work was in many ways about drawing connections, as can be seen in her work on syntax and discourse functions, in her work on pragmatic borrowing (Prince 1988b), and in her later work on CENTERING THEORY (Walker & Prince 1996, Walker et al. 1998). Centering theory (Grosz et al. 1995) connects strands from information structure, psycholinguistics, and computer science in a theory of local coherence in discourse. It ranks the referring expressions in a sentence as a list of FORWARD-LOOKING CENTERS based on their potential to be the BACKWARD-LOOKING CENTER of the next sentence, where the backward-looking center is the topic of the sentence and is defined as the highest member of the previous sentence's list of forward-looking centers expressed in the current sentence. By giving teeth to the often vaguely defined concept of a sentence topic, centering theory appealed to Ellen for its promise to lend computational tractability to the relationship between linguistic form and discourse function.

Ellen served widely and successfully as a linguistic expert in a variety of forensic contexts before becoming frustrated at the limitations of the process, as was driven home to her in the courtroom when, in the middle of her dramatic illustration of the im-

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portance of prosodic cues for determining speaker's intentions, she noticed the consternation of the court reporter, betraying (as was later confirmed) the absence of any systematic means for indicating stress, much less intonation. In Prince 1990—an influential paper on the use and widespread MISuse of surreptitiously recorded conversations by federal prosecutors as evidence in criminal trials—Ellen characterizes the forensic understanding of language in her inimitable style ('outrageously inexcusable', 'grossly misunderstood', 'careless and uninformed work on the part of the federal government'), but concedes that the problems are easier to identify than the solutions. 'Perhaps', she concludes, 'the best we can hope for is a more knowledgeable government, one that knows how to listen to speech, how to transcribe it, and how to interpret it, one that is informed by basic linguistic and sociolinguistic principles of how social conversations work and of how individuals interact verbally. In short, maybe it's time for Big Brother to learn some linguistics' (1990:288). Then as now, Big Brother could have done worse than begin by sitting in on Ellen's own classes or downloading papers from her website.

Among Ellen's greatest joys as a professor were the close bonds she formed with her students. All told, Ellen supervised nineteen Ph.D. dissertations between 1985 and 2005, an average of about one per year. In addition, she served on several dozen dissertation committees at Penn (in the Departments of Linguistics, Computer & Information Science, and Psychology, and in the Graduate School of Education) and elsewhere (including Columbia University, Tel-Aviv University, the University of Toronto, La Trobe University (Melbourne), and Yeshiva University).

A prolific scholar with more than sixty publications and more than 150 talks and presentations to her name, Ellen also served on numerous editorial boards and program committees throughout her career. In addition to being elected President of the Linguistic Society of America, her service to the LSA included being Associate Director of two LSA Institutes (while teaching at three others) and membership on many committees, including a term on the Executive Committee (1992–1994). In 2009, she was honored by her peers by being elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. When Ellen was unable to give her presidential address in 2009 due to her declining health, the LSA celebrated her career by organizing the Ellen F. Prince Tribute Symposium, which provided the presenters and attendees an opportunity to comment on Ellen's work and the enormous impact that it—and she—had on their lives.

Never one to suffer fools gladly, Ellen had a reputation for being at times stern if not downright gruff. However, her razor-sharp wit and Brooklyn bravado belied a tender and generous spirit. Her intensity permeated all aspects of her life. When she and Gerry decided to have a house built in 1988 she immersed herself in every detail—even driving to New Jersey to look at a house built of a brick whose color she was considering. With Ellen's detailed attention their house turned out beautifully, and was filled with an eclectic array of artwork that she and Gerry had collected on their extensive travels, including such treasures as a collection of needlepoint *ketubahs* (Jewish marriage contracts). And plants. Ellen was a great admirer of cacti and was proud of her membership in the Philadelphia Cactus and Succulent Society.

Always a great admirer of dogs, upon retirement she finally, after months of looking, found the perfect 'Min Pin' (miniature pinscher), Misty. (Ellen felt that the three-year-old dog, named 'Mysti' by her previous caretakers, was too old for a full name change, but that she would not object to a revision of the original somewhat orthographically challenged version. Apparently Misty was fine with that.) Misty was a beloved companion during Ellen's last several years and, in addition to the other treasures, the house became full of dog beds and blankets in every room.

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Ellen's friends, colleagues, and students were fortunate to have had more time with her than anyone, including herself, expected. She long outlived her prognosis (or, as she enjoyed putting it, her 'expiration date') and for that we are grateful. For over twenty-five years, Ellen and Gerry got together annually with a group of out-of-town friends for poker and merriment. After her diagnosis, her poker friends were privileged to have not just one but two more get-togethers (the second of which Ellen herself organized). Under the circumstances, one might have thought that these events would be sad, but that was not at all the case; they were joyful celebrations. For Ellen never lost her characteristic humor, wit, and *joie de vivre*. Life for Ellen was about intensely experiencing and reflecting on her rich array of interests—from the discourse functions of syntax to the growth cycle of a cactus, from an appreciation of the music of Sarah Gorby to an awe at the intelligence of dogs, from an admiration of the expertise of folk artists to a deep love of Yiddish and the intellectual and artistic culture of its speakers. Ellen's zest and intensity were a gift to all who knew her. Few people have had a greater impact in the field or on as many people as Ellen Prince. Her legacy continues in the lives of her many students (and grandstudents) and the many people inside and outside of linguistics whose lives she touched. [GREGORY WARD, *Northwestern University*; BETTY J. BIRNER, *Northern Illinois University*; LAURENCE R. HORN, *Yale University*; BARBARA ABBOTT, *Michigan State University*; PAULINE JACOBSON, *Brown University*; and JERROLD M. SADOCK, *University of Chicago*.]*

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