J MILTON COWAN

J Milton Cowan, a member of our Society since 1937, our secretary-treasurer from 1941 through 1950, and our president in 1966, died on Monday, December 20, 1993, while visiting his son Bruce in Northampton, Massachusetts, from complications following hip-replacement surgery.[1]

Milt was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 22, 1907, the son of James Brimley Cowan, a hard-working butcher, and his wife Mabel Vickers (née Brown). At his birth, his parents, hesitating between the first names James and John, decided to give him neither but to let him make his own choice later. Meanwhile, the lone capital J served as a place-holder. In due time he rejected both alternatives; instead, when asked to give his full name, he would regularly cite it as 'J, no period, Milton Cowan'. In the years that followed he acquired diverse nicknames, matching his remarkably varied circles of friends; the one used in this testament is the one most familiar to his fellow linguists.

As a young man in the 1920s, Milt got a job as driver of a tour bus for a company that took visitors to see the sights of southern Utah. After one or two trips with a geologist as tour guide, he told the company they would need the guide no more, since he had learned it all. Geology, especially that of the Colorado River Plateau and the Grand Canyon, remained a permanent interest. That was typical: he lived a life of accumulation, not replacement, each new interest supplementing those he already had, each new friend become a friend for life.

Milt began his formal education in the public schools of Salt Lake City. He attended a technical high school, where, among other things, he took a course in printing (useful later, as we shall see). He may well have enrolled in other technical courses, since subsequently he regularly undertook, on his own, various tasks of household plumbing, carpentering, and wiring for which most of us call on specialists. For recreation during his school years he played tennis, often with the future writer Wallace Stegner (Milt liked to say 'Wally and I went to different high schools together'). In high school and then at the University of Utah he distinguished himself both scholastically and in track-and-field athletics. The former pointed toward his career, but the latter also presaged later activities: he became, in the 1960s, one of the pioneers in scuba diving, and was still going on dives in his early eighties. And on July 6, 1992, at age eighty-five, assisted by his friend Dr. Edward E. Hart, he participated in a competitive

[1] For this account I have drawn freely on a memorial statement prepared for Cornell University by R. A. Hall Jr, R. L. Leed, and myself; on Hall (forthcoming); and on Leed (1994). Milt's children, especially J Ronayne Cowan of the University of Illinois, have willingly given me what help they could, but the family archives are remarkably sparse. Personnel at the Universities of Utah, California, and Iowa have likewise answered my queries as best their records allowed. Margaret W. Reynolds kindly supplied me with material from issues of the LSA Bulletin missing in my own files. Some assertions in the text rely solely on memory—mine, my wife's, or both. I think these are all correct, though in most cases I have been unable to find supporting documentary evidence.

Cowan (1991) includes an excellent portrait of Milt in his later years.

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3.1-mile walk, jogging the last mile, and was named Athlete of the Week by Ithaca's radio station WHCU.

Milt's college career was interrupted for him to fulfill the duty required of all young men in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: to serve a period (normally thirty months) as a missionary. For this he went first to Gleiwitz and Breslau (at the time part of Germany, now in Poland, respectively Gliwice and Wroclaw), then to Magdeburg, and finally to Erfurt. Especially in Magdeburg he made close and lasting friendships. The record also shows him attending lectures at the University of Leipzig from May to October of 1930. The solid command of German he acquired in this period stayed with him: in his last years, his reading for pleasure was as likely to be a current German novel as anything in English.

Back in Utah, he earned his baccalaureate in 1931 and a master's degree in 1932, both with a German major; his MA thesis was 'Kritik des dramas "Ermordete Majestät, oder Karolus Stuardus, König von Gross-Britannien" von Andreas Gryphius'.

In the spring of 1932 Milt was awarded the W. D. Thompson Fellowship in German to study at the University of California. He and Wally Stegner went to Berkeley together and were roommates there. But in June, 1933, they left, and proceeded to Iowa City to study at the University of Iowa. I think I remember Milt telling me that that university had announced a writing program in which Wally wanted to participate, whereupon Milt decided that for his purposes Iowa would be as satisfactory as California. For both of them it was a fateful change. As Milt's son Ron writes, 'It was there that they met their future wives, who were rooming together. Mom [Theodora ('Ted') Mary Ronayne] was born in Austin, Texas, and at the time they met, was the secretary to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University....After a persistent courtship they got married [on September 1] in 1934.' Their three children (J Ronayne, Bruce Milton, and Julia) all arrived in the ensuing Iowa years, before the removal to Washington to be reported later.

At the university, Milt's affiliations were with the departments of psychology, dramatic art, and German. The records are sketchy, but in 1934 he was apparently a research assistant in dramatic art, which at that time was the appropriate department for the study of experimental phonetics; in 1936 he was an assistant research associate in the same department, with the same focus; and from 1938 through June 1940 he was assistant professor of German. Meanwhile he had earned his doctorate, with a thesis, 'Pitch, intensity, and rhythmic movements in American dramatic speech', defending the thesis on August 15, 1935, and receiving the degree on August 22. His mentor in experimental phonetics was Joseph Tiflin; in German, Erich Funke. On March 23, 1938, he was elected to the Iowa chapter of Sigma Xi.

In 1934 Milt had joined the Modern Language Association, in 1936 the Acoustical Society of America, and in 1937, as already noted, our own Society. In 1941 he was chairman of the experimental phonetics section of the Modern Language Association; in 1941–42, a member of the advisory board to the journal *American Speech*.

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To back up a bit: in the summer of 1936 Milt went to the University of Michigan for the first Linguistic Institute held there under the joint auspices of the University and the LSA. In his own words (Cowan 1975.28),

> I found a staff of venerable scholars and a group of bright young students pursuing the scientific study of language with a devotion, often with a passion, that I had never before experienced. They even listened to me when I talked (nonsense) about the psychophysiology of language or about work I had done in experimental phonetics. Better still: they invited me to come back the following year with a set of prepared lectures. By the end of the 1937 Institute I was hooked. I knew that my career was going to be linguistics and the Linguistic Society of America was the greatest organization in the world.

That summer (1937), Milt came to the institute as a lecturer in linguistics, offering a course in mechanical apparatus and instrumental techniques. On July 13 he gave a luncheon-conference talk on intonation in English, French, and German; later, on Wednesday, August 11, he and Bernard Bloch gave back-to-back talks on the movements of the vocal organs during speech as revealed by special kinds of motion pictures. In his part of this joint presentation, he showed 'moving pictures of the larynx recently successfully taken by the Bell Telephone laboratories and loaned to him for exhibiting at Ann Arbor' (Joos 1986.92). A year and a half later, at the 1938 annual meeting, the record shows a new pair of papers from the two of them, this time on phrasing and syntax. I dimly remember Milt and Bernard discussing, some years later, the possibility of writing up one of those talks (I don't know which) for publication, but apparently they never did.

Milt was hooked not only on the LSA but also on the institutes. He attended the ones at Michigan through 1940, then the one at Chapel Hill in 1941, the 1944 one at Madison, and the one in 1948 back at Ann Arbor. He was on the teaching staff in 1939, 1940, and 1941. Also, from the very beginning in 1936, just as he did in every involvement throughout life, he established a great number of friendships. Of the society's several hundred personal members in the 1930s and 1940s, there were about sixty who were truly active, attending meetings as regularly as they could, publishing in our journal, performing diverse society duties, and all knowing one another personally. Milt soon knew, and was known to, every one of these, many of them—including such elder statesmen as Leonard Bloomfield—on a first-name basis. Apart from those who subsequently joined him at Cornell (see below), he developed particularly close ties with a half dozen or so, especially with Yuenren Chao (1892–1982), W. Freeman Twaddell (1906–82), Martin Joos (1907–78), Bernard Bloch (1907–65), and, slightly later, Henry Lee ('Haxie') Smith Jr (1913–72).

There is conflicting evidence about developments in 1940–42. The payroll office at the University of Iowa, admitting that their records are scant, reports that he resigned in June 1940, but family records (and Who's Who in America) keep him at Iowa for another two years, until April 1942 when he left to join the staff of the American Council of Learned Societies. This latter date for his departure from Iowa is supported by an article in a May 1942 issue of the student newspaper at that university (clipping supplied to me by Ron Cowan),

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and by a letter from Mortimer Graves to Joos (cited in Joos 1986.94) which says Milt came in 'March or April 1942'.

At the seventeenth annual meeting of the society, in Providence R.I. in December 1940, with the great anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber as president, our first secretary-treasurer, Roland G. Kent, presented his final reports and turned over the symbols and appurtenances of those offices to his newly elected successor, J M. Cowan. The nominating committee, consisting of Ephraim A. Speiser, Charles C. Fries, and Franklin Edgerton, had named that successor. Unidentified members had independently nominated George Sherman Lane for the position, and Lane was willing. We know that Kent preferred Lane, who clearly would have served nobly and well—the membership was confronted by an embarrassment of riches. But in the run-off conducted at the meeting, Milt was chosen, and immediately received Kent's cautious blessing. Again in Milt's own words (Cowan 1975.29), 'As soon as the election was over he congratulated me and then set about instructing me in my duties. I made two trips to Philadelphia for orientation before he would allow the books to be transferred to me at the University of Iowa. He was somewhat reassured when he learned that my wife had had experience in a bank and was an excellent bookkeeper.'

This is the proper place to interrupt our account of Milt's career and pay long overdue fuller homage, on behalf of the society, not only to Theodora Mary Ronayne Cowan but also to her successor, Muriel Louise Bayard Hill, wife of Milt's successor, Archibald A. Hill, all now deceased. There was no thought of a paid secretariat in the 1940s and 1950s. A justifiable part of the reason for this was the small size of the society, whose precipitous growth began only in the late 1950s (in 1940 the membership was about five hundred fifty; only in 1954 did it break a thousand). The rest of the reason was the temper of the times, on which we now frown but for which we must not blame individuals caught up by it: in those days it was taken as a matter of course that academic wives would help their husbands without special compensation. And they did!—see LSA Bulletin 24.16 (1951), King 1994, and below. It is now too late for any other reward, but our society can at least honor their memory along with that of their husbands.

Although, as just noted, the 1940s were not the period of most rapid growth of our society, nevertheless, with the war, they were difficult times. Milt's service as our secretary-treasurer was in some measure helped, but also rendered more complicated, by his selection in 1942 as the director of the Intensive Language Program (hereafter ILP) of the American Council of Learned Societies. Also, for a year and a half after his move to Washington in early 1942, his family was split, Ted and the children—and the Society's files—remaining in Iowa City while he holed up as best he could in Washington when not performing the extensive peripatetic part of his new duties. Only in late 1943 was the family able to join him, in a house he had managed to buy in Silver Spring, Maryland.

As early as the mid 1930s, F. Mortimer Graves, the secretary of the ACLS, had recognized that the United States was badly in need of people with compe-

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tence in 'strategic languages', including many not taught at any institution in the country. In 1941 he obtained a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, with which he established the ILP and began to sponsor a series of pilot courses in some of those languages. The courses were built on a triad of premises well known to us linguists but still unfamiliar to a distressingly large proportion of the general educated public: (1) the primacy of speech over writing, which means the learner must hear, imitate, and understand native (or near-native) speakers of the target language; (2) intensive concentration—as many hours per day as possible; and (3) guidance by someone trained in linguistic analysis, in order to focus on the real differences between the learner's native language and that being acquired and to avoid the multitudinous time-wasting traps that arise from popular misconceptions about the nature of language. The partly independent work begun somewhat later at '165 Broadway', as it was familiarly referred to (officially the Language Section, Education Branch, Information and Education Division, Army Service Forces, located in New York City at that address), under Milt's close friend and colleague Haxie Smith, was based on the same principles.

Milt's role in the ACLS was as roving overseer of this enterprise, a project initially small but very shortly expanded by the military authorities into the large-scale Army Specialized Training Program, involving thousands of soldier-students and many universities. The enormous size of the operation made inevitably for diversity, and the underlying principles were in many cases lost sight of. But wherever all three were adhered to, the operation was eminently successful. Milt made the most of his enforced ACLS travels not only to expand his circle of friends but also to continue another of his lifelong interests: the collection and distribution of good jokes. Many a tale made its first transit of the continent in his head. He was an excellent raconteur—and, if it be possible, an even better listener.

Of course, there were also local duties in Washington. Early in the ACLS period Milt and Mortimer Graves prepared a report on the ILP's first year. Although copies for distribution were badly needed, they could not find a printer. But Milt had a Washington friend, Henry Edmunds, who owned a small hand-operated press; calling on his high-school training, Milt and Henry set the type and printed it themselves (Joos 1986.101; the report is reprinted in Joos 1986.97–112).

By the summer of 1944 Milt was badly in need of a break from these multiple responsibilities. Graves sent him off to the Linguistic Institute at Madison for a rest. There he and Freeman Twaddell (at that time a member of the University of Wisconsin faculty) made a busman's holiday of it by registering as students in the summer's intensive course in elementary spoken Chinese. The summer was a refreshing change, and Milt returned to Washington reinvigorated.

Milt's service as secretary-treasurer to our society began before his work with the ACLS, and continued after his move in 1946 from Washington to Ithaca. It was in 1950 that he passed on the LSA torch to Archibald A. Hill (see Milt's own accounts in Cowan 1975 and 1991). The sterling nature of his—and wife Ted's—performance of LSA duties during the decade is clearly

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shown by the testimonials offered when he relinquished the office, both by our editor, Bernard Bloch (Bloch 1951) and by the membership as a whole in the form of a resolution introduced by William G. Moulton (Moulton 1951).

One of the successful operations of the Army Specialized Training Program was at Cornell University, where, in 1944–45, there were groups in Russian and Italian. Their supervisor was the then Dean of Arts and Sciences, Cornelis Willem De Kiewiet. He and Milt had known each other at Iowa, where De Kiewiet had served in the history department. Impressed by the success of the Army's programs at Cornell, early in 1946 De Kiewiet took advantage of several impending faculty retirements and other campus changes to persuade the Arts College to institute a radical revision of foreign-language teaching, involving an adaptation of the principles of the ILP to civilian conditions. Milt accepted an invitation to come that autumn to serve as director of the newly established Division of Modern Languages. Gordon H. Fairbanks (1913–1985), a specialist in German, Russian and Hindi, had arrived the preceding February; the other young linguists that Milt gathered, immediately or within a year or so, to serve in the new operation were Robert Anderson Hall Jr. (French, Italian, Romance), Frederick Browning Agard (1907–93; Spanish, Romance), William Gamaliel Moulton (German, Germanic), John Echols (1913–82; Indonesian), and I (Chinese). All of these, including Milt, were active in general linguistics as well as in second-language teaching, and all were members of our society. That continued to be the case, or almost so, through all the personnel changes the division experienced in its twenty-six years of existence.

The story of Milt's career at Cornell is the story of the division, because upon his retirement the remaining members took the initiative in changing its official status and its name: with the approval of the college it became, in 1972, the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics. The details belong elsewhere, but it must be recorded here that under Milt's leadership there took place at Cornell some of the most efficient and effective foreign-language learning ever seen as part of a regular college curriculum (that is, as over against special intensive programs that leave little or no time for anything else). The bulk of this activity was, to be sure, in the handful of Western European languages traditional in American universities. But almost as much effort went to Russian and Chinese, and a good deal even farther afield: in fact, at one time or another instruction was offered in a total of thirty-four different languages. Moreover, in its alter ego as the Field of Linguistics in the Graduate School, Milt's faculty awarded, during his twenty-six years as director, a total of eighty-eight doctorates, whose recipients subsequently have held positions all over the world (Leed 1994; Anonymous 1972).

This effectiveness and diversity led also to many productive collaborations with other organizations. On campus, these were especially with the literature departments, Far Eastern studies, and anthropology. Off campus, there were joint programs with, once again, the ACLS (including the preparation of a series of introductory courses in English for speakers of other languages); with the Language Training Section of the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State (to which Haxie Smith had moved after the war); and with Standard

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Oil of Venezuela, Aramco (Arabian-American Oil Company), several National Defense Education Act Institutes, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Various members of the division, including Milt himself, were from time to time seconded to diverse parts of the world in connection with these cooperative enterprises. In his nonadministrative role in these, Milt became an Arabic expert. (For more detail see Hall, forthcoming.)

After Milt's retirement the newly named Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics carried on for a number of years in much the same spirit. But those years, as we know, saw a sea-change in the linguistics profession. Milt and his original coworkers had believed firmly not only in the relevance of linguistics for second-language learning but also the reverse—that the practical enterprises of teaching and learning languages can afford valuable insights into the nature of language. The new wave in linguistics saw no such connection, which meant that there came to be little reason for the two activities to be housed in a single department. These developments saddened Milt considerably. Despite his essentially upbeat character, he felt, at times, that a lifetime of effort had been largely wasted.

Retirement from Cornell, however, by no means meant the end of Milt's service to our discipline. True, he was able to take more time for recreation, which meant mainly an increase in the number of scuba-diving expeditions in which he participated. But in 1972 he and Ted established a publishing house, Spoken Language Services, and proceeded to obtain the reprint rights, from D.C. Heath and from Holt, Rinehart and Winston, on the series of language-learning textbooks that had been prepared under his and Haxie Smith's general supervision during the war; the accompanying recordings were transferred from vinyl disks to cassette tapes. Some of the content of these primers had been outdated, of course, but the method—the particular strategy of presentation, drill, and review—still remained unsurpassed, and for some languages virtually no other beginners' books were available. The company also contracted for some new introductory books based on the same principles, and developed some bilingual dictionaries, particularly Arabic-English. (The company continues still, managed by Asher O. Hockett—our son—and Gail Kramer.)

Milt himself published very little—not his graduate school thesis or doctoral dissertation, not the interesting talk on the Deseret alphabet delivered at the 1940 annual meeting, not even his presidential address 'Attention', delivered to the society in 1966. The nonpublication of the last (at least) was unfortunate. It was germinally stimulating for those of us who have come to focus our analytical powers more on listeners than on speakers; at one point it highlighted the memorable remark 'we listen for what we expect to hear'. That aphorism and a sense of the context in which it was offered are all that remain of the address; apparently no copy survives.

Bob Hall has aptly characterized Milt as an enabler. It seems to me Milt must have decided early on that, however much he might achieve in scholarly research (and he surely underestimated himself on that score), he would serve his chosen field better—and have more fun!—by pursuing a different course. In the event, his greatest strength lay in having faith in the practical relevance

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of linguistics, in seeing what needed to be done, in finding people who were eager and able to do it, and in smoothing the way for them. He took great pride and pleasure in the achievements of those about him, and in response to that we at Cornell (and elsewhere) were devoted to his leadership and worked very hard to be worthy of his approval. If the number of publications under his byline is small, the number of pedagogical and scientific works done under his aegis is enormous.

Milt's success stemmed from his remarkably warm and loyal nature. As was noted near the beginning of this account, any friend he made was a friend for life. In 1993, only months before his own death, he flew to California to be present at the memorial service for his old roommate Wally Stegner, who had died earlier in the year. And in those same final months he was remarking to us that he should get back to Germany to visit people he had met there in the late 1920s, since the few who survived were getting pretty old and feeble.

The vast web of friendships that Milt built around himself over the years was his safety net, the framework of warm human ties that more than anything else gave meaning to his life. It was also a blessing for the friends. Our own case always seemed special to us, but actually was typical. My wife Shirley and I knew Milt and Ted for more than a half century; our children knew them from birth. After Ted's death in 1986, our son Asher went to work for Spoken Language Services and thus saw Milt almost daily, while Shirley and I had dinner with him at least once a week and regularly took him with us to concerts and other public events. None of his own family was in Ithaca, so we made him a member of ours.

We have lost a beloved friend. But we have not lost his friendship, which will continue for a long time to reverberate in the lives of all who knew him. [CHARLES F. HOCKETT, *Cornell University and Rice University*]

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