

THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

Looking ahead, looking back—past, present, and future

Balkanists, those scholars who study the interactions among the languages (and peoples) of the Balkans, often talk, half-jokingly, about conferences and events being run on 'Balkan time', by which we mean that punctuality is not an issue.¹ In editing this journal, however, punctuality is crucial, so that I find I must constantly be conscious of time.

A curious aspect of this necessary careful attention to time in the journal business is that one always has to be looking ahead, no matter what time of year it is (even year-end, typically a time for reflecting back on the year that has just ended). In the usual case, one issue of *Language* is in the final stages of production (i.e. proofs being read and checked by authors and by editorial assistants and corrections being made by the compositors) as the next one is entering the early stages (i.e. accepted papers being sent out for copyediting and ultimate conversion into journal pages), while at the same time papers are being accepted for the issue beyond that one. Further, book reviews and book notices roll in on their own schedule, to be folded into each issue as space permits. As if that weren't enough, every three months the production cycle starts anew, offering a rhythm to editorial life that keeps us busy, but productively so, that is, always involved and engaged; clearly, there is never any 'down' time for *Language*. One way of thinking about this time-merge is that the past and the future of the journal are always integral parts of the present for us.²

Looking ahead to the future is thus crucial in my role as editor. As it happens, despite appearing at the end of the year, this piece has been gestating in my thinking over several months, during which time a variety of factors caused me to look ahead along other fronts. One came in the form of a provisional tally, ranging over the past year, that was made in the *Language* office as part of the preparation for my putting together my annual report. In addition, two events—the spring 2003 Central Ohio District Science Day (held at Columbus State Community College in Columbus on March 22, 2003) and the Linguistic Institute at Michigan State University in the summer—stimulated my thinking further on the future, thus leading to this piece.

What do all these have to do with one another? As I see it, they all pertain in some way to the future of the field and thus require some longer-range looking ahead.

The informal tally showed that submissions to *Language* are up considerably this year over the previous year (see the text of the report in next year's June issue for full details). We are thus in a 'bull' market for linguistics as far as *Language* is concerned. But, as one must wonder with all bull markets, will it continue, and if so, for how long? Moreover, where will the papers for future issues come from? More generally, to pose a single key question for our field: Where will the linguists of the future come from?

The answers—in part—lie in the two events I mentioned above.

I had the chance to spend three weeks this past summer at the LSA Institute, where, as at past Institutes for many decades, there were not only senior scholars teaching

¹ It may well be that this view of time is to be found in other areas of the world besides the Balkans (maybe all but Northern Europe and derivative cultures such as the US), but I speak here of the part of the world with which I am most familiar from a scholarly standpoint.

² I would like to thank Manos Iatrides of Athens, Greece, for this apt characterization of the intersection of journal editing with temporality.

classes, giving talks, participating in workshops, and the like, but also large numbers of younger scholars, both recently minted Ph.D.s and current graduate students, as well as some undergraduates. All were joined by a common interest in language in its myriad of aspects, the tie that binds all of us in the Linguistic Society together. Clearly, the future of our field was visible to anyone in attendance there.

At the Science Day, which I had occasion to attend as a judge, nothing *BUT* young scholars could be seen, and in a sense, this may be where the answer to my question really lies. Most Institute participants have already made a commitment to our field, but introducing those who do not know about the field to what the scientific study of language has to offer is crucial to bringing new people into linguistics. As far as the Science Day is concerned, aimed as it is at middle and high school students, the Linguistics Department at my institution does what it can to promote our field, sponsoring a prize, judged by department faculty, that recognizes the best project focused on language, at both the middle and high school levels.³ Over the few years that we have done this, we have seen some very interesting projects on language effects in memory recall, on sound associations, on phonemic awareness in reading, and on perception of language as opposed to music, among others. Nothing as yet has emerged that is publishable in *Language*, of course, but all the projects definitely show promising beginnings!

Other fields have established successful outreach programs in the schools. The 'hard' sciences dominate the Science Day events at the district, state, and even national levels, with prizes offered by numerous local and national professional organizations; Mock Trial competitions give pre-college students a taste of what legal work can involve; language departments regularly bring well-designed programs into elementary, middle, and high schools to give students enticing tastes of foreign cultures; and even agriculture is promoted through such organizations as Future Farmers of America and 4-H Clubs.

These fields may have an advantage in that they already have a toehold in the schools via foreign language instruction and science classes, or enjoy a ubiquity, in the case of law and agriculture, that linguistics does not.

Still, there have been some efforts that have worked to fill this function for our field, reaching earlier into the educational system for younger students than are served by the excellent work that all linguistics programs do on behalf of undergraduate education in the field. For several years, for instance, there has been the 'Linguistic Olympics', developed by Russian linguist A. Zaliznjak and first held in 1965 at Moscow State University and regularly since then, and since the late 1990s also held in the United States under the direction of Thomas Payne of the University of Oregon.

Perhaps even more important is the LSA's on-going interest in developing the study of language as a part of school curricula around the country, largely through the LSA's Language in the School Curriculum Committee (LiSC). This committee was established in 1992 and its formal charge is described (e.g. on the LSA website) as follows: 'This ad hoc advisory committee explores and pursues ways that linguists can affect school instruction in language-related topics, including linguistics.' It has been engaged in a number of interesting, and potentially very important, activities aimed ultimately at

³ The exact statement of the award is as follows: 'A \$60 award and certificate for the best high school project and a \$40 award and certificate for the best middle school project . . . involving: 1) the investigation of some aspect of the nature of language (looking at sounds, words, sentences, or meaning), or 2) the investigation of the analysis of language, the perception of language, or the production of language, or 3) the examination of language as it changes through time or varies dialectally across a population'.

bringing linguistics and especially awareness of language to classrooms, teachers, students, and parents at pre-collegiate levels.

To me, the grass-roots infusion of linguistics into the schools will undoubtedly yield a greater understanding on the part of the general populace of the role that language plays in our lives, and thus of the importance of studying this aspect of human cognition, behavior, and interaction.⁴

I am optimistic by nature, but all the developments mentioned here—Linguistic Institutes, Science Days with language-related projects, the work of the LiSC, and so on—make me quite sanguine about the future of our field as I look ahead. An hour spent this past summer in my Linguistic Institute office with an undergraduate attending his first Institute, with big plans to attend another and yet another through graduate school, was heartening and encouraging to say the least, as is the palpable excitement evident when greeting the winners of the Linguistics Award at a local Science Day (and I say this from first-hand experience). We need more such students and more such winners to be sure, but the right efforts are being made and what is needed to ensure the future of the field is happening, to borrow a Balkan phrase, *yavaş yavaş/avash avash/јаваш јаваш/яваш яваш/σιγά σιγά*.⁵

Brian D. Joseph
Columbus, Ohio
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⁴ These efforts are not restricted to the United States. Dick Hudson of University College London, for instance, is founder of the Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLIE) in England, and similar projects are underway in Australia and elsewhere.

⁵ These phrases are Turkish, Albanian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Greek, respectively, and all mean 'slowly' (reduplicated, thus literally 'slowly slowly'). Albanian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian have clearly borrowed from the Turkish in this case; the Greek *σιγά* literally means 'quietly' (from Ancient Greek *σιγή* 'in silence', a dative case form of *σιγή* 'silence' used adverbially), but the reduplicated nature of the Greek expression suggests some affinity with the other Balkan expressions. This phrasal Balkanism carries perhaps a somewhat negative implication that results may never be achieved, and that is most assuredly not the case for outreach efforts in linguistics; thus, to put it in a more positive light, one might characterize the progress as happening 'slowly but surely'.