

## THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Reviewing our contents

Just a few months ago, as this issue was taking shape, there arrived on the scene a new item in the *Language* 'family' of publications: the *Twentieth-century index*, a listing of works published in *Language* in the twentieth century. This impressive tome, 597 dense pages long, was edited by Meghan Sumner and my predecessor, Mark Aronoff. It covers the first seventy-six years of *Language*, 1925 to 2000, thus all of the volumes (1 through 76) of the journal that appeared in the twentieth century. In it are listed the authors who have published in *Language*, the articles (regular, review articles, discussion notes, etc.) that they have published (listed by title), the books that have been reviewed (listed separately by book author, by title, and by review author), and occasional other items (e.g. obituaries, authors' responses to reviews, and the like). A technological marvel, made possible by optical character recognition software, it is based on the fifty-year index produced in 1975 and the subsequent ten-year index covering 1975 to 1984, augmented with the material from each annual index published at the end of each volume since 1985.

The availability<sup>1</sup> of this useful tome has led me to some observations on the wide range of items published in the journal, the breadth of coverage given to the field, and the various linguists whose work has been showcased in the pages of the journal. For instance, working just from the first word of titles,<sup>2</sup> one sees that languages from Akkadian to Zuni and topics from A-bar syntax to the *Zweite Lautverschiebung* of Germanic are represented; moreover, *Language* has published articles by scholars from Aarsleff (Hans) to Zwicky (Arnold) and has reviewed books by authors from Aalto (Pentti) to Zyar (M. A.)—all in all, a veritable *Who's who* of linguistics. Further, the listings permit some interesting glimpses into aspects of the history of the discipline and the journal; Roland Kent (president of the LSA in 1941), for instance, has by far the most entries as author, with nearly four and a half pages filled primarily with listings of obituary notices and book reviews but with several articles as well (mostly on his specialty, Old Persian), and William Bright (past editor of this journal and inventor in 1977, starting with volume 53, of the Book Notice)<sup>3</sup> is a close second, with almost four pages filled with numerous book notices but with some articles too. The material also allows for the formulation of *Language* trivia: the most common first word of a title, for instance, is 'On' (found in some two-pages' worth of entries, and appearing first chronologically in 'On a case of Indo-European suppletive suffixes' by Maurice Bloomfield in *Language* 1.88–95 (1925)); the most common first word in book titles is 'Language' (covering nearly eight pages of entries); and, as best I can tell (there is

<sup>1</sup> A note on the availability of this index is in order: it has been sent to all institutional members and to those individual members who had ordered one; a few hard copies remain for those who want to order one at this point (see the advertisement in the end pages of this issue). It will be available later this year on-line in a searchable format (pdf or Word) on the *Language* website (<http://www.lsadc.org/language>). Each year this cumulative index will be brought up to date by incorporating the year-end index into it, and a separate cumulative index for the twenty-first century will be compiled as well, also on-line.

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, all that the print version allows one to do easily; more sophisticated searches will be possible with the electronic version.

<sup>3</sup> Book notices were called 'Brief Notices' when they first appeared in 1977, and only the next year, in 1978, were they renamed as 'Book Notices'. The index solves the nomenclature dilemma this shift poses by abbreviating them both as 'BN'.

no clear search algorithm that gives this at present), the longest article is 'Ergativity' by R. M. W. Dixon (*Language* 55.59–138 (1979)).

Looking through this volume has also led me to ponder the question of which papers qualify as the best, the most important, or the most influential that have been published in the pages of *Language*. Surely if this is one of the leading journals in the field—and for a long time, after all, it was one of the few—then its articles ought to have had an impact on scholarship in our discipline.

I have my personal favorites: Leonard Bloomfield 1925 ('On the sound-system of Central Algonquian', *Language* 1.130–56), with its immortal statement about the regularity of sound change,<sup>4</sup> is one, as is his brief 1928 follow-up piece ('A note on sound-change', *Language* 4.99–100) with its further endorsement of the notion of regular sound-change;<sup>5</sup> I would add as well James McCawley 1970 ('English as a VSO language', *Language* 46.286–99), a paper that contains intriguing argumentation and that had at the time of its publication an edgy and iconoclastic feel to it (never mind that it is clearly dated now, unlike Bloomfield's paper, the insights in which seem to be good for all time).

I also find myself repeatedly citing or referring students to Arnold M. Zwicky and Geoffrey K. Pullum 1983 ('Cliticization vs. inflection: English *n't*', *Language* 59.502–13), regarding the analysis of the English negative marker *-n't*, a paper that I consider to be as clear a demonstration of precise and compelling linguistic argumentation as there is; to Henning Andersen 1973 ('Abductive and deductive change', *Language* 49.765–93), a paper with sharp insights into the nature and mechanisms of language change, and some difficult parts too, but certainly well worth the effort to read (and to re-read); and to Maurice Gross 1979 ('On the failure of generative grammar', *Language* 55.859–85), a paper that discusses an overt challenge to the notions of 'generalization' and 'categorization' that we linguists are so fond of.

Besides my own subjective views on this matter, there are as well some objective measures that can be brought in here. In particular, there is information from citation indices, in particular the *Social Sciences Citation Index* and the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, both created and maintained by ISI Web of Knowledge ([www.isinet.com/isi](http://www.isinet.com/isi)), and covering citations in these general areas (linguistics falls into both, as it happens) from 1980 on, that allows one to see how often particular articles are cited. In addition, the existence now of JSTOR (*The Scholarly Journal Archive*, [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)) makes it possible to develop statistics on which articles from its on-line version of *Language* are viewed and downloaded most frequently. Finally, a few years ago (1996), the LSA produced an informal list of those *Language* articles for which permission to reprint has been sought, giving an indication of the most requested articles up to then.

<sup>4</sup> Specifically (130, n. 1): 'I hope, also, to dispose of the notion that the usual processes of linguistic change are suspended on the American continent (Meillet and Cohen, *Les langues du monde*, Paris 1924, p. 9). If there exists anywhere a language in which these processes do not occur (sound-change independent of meaning, analogic change, etc.), then they will not explain the history of Indo-European or of any other language. A principle such as the regularity of phonetic change is not part of the specific tradition handed on to each new speaker of a given language, but is either a universal trait of human speech or nothing at all, an error.'

<sup>5</sup> Specifically (100): 'The postulate of sound-change without exceptions will probably always remain a mere assumption . . . As an assumption, however, this postulate yields, as a matter of mere routine, predictions which otherwise would be impossible. In other words, the statement that . . . sound-changes have no exceptions . . . is a tested hypothesis: in so far as one may speak of such a thing, it is a proved truth.'

What emerges from these measures is that the 1974 article 'A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation' by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson (*Language* 50.696–735) is by far the most-cited article from *Language*, based on the citation indices, and is near the top of both the JSTOR list for 2003 and the LSA reprint-request list. Another piece commanding considerable attention in this way is Noam Chomsky's 1959 review of B. F. Skinner's *Verbal behavior*, published in *Language* 35.26–58 and falling near the top of both the JSTOR list and the citation indices and at the top of the LSA reprint-request list. Other works seeing a fair amount of 'traffic' by these measures include the 1974 article 'The linguistic development of Genie' by Susan Curtiss, Victoria Fromkin, Stephen Krashen, David Rigler, and Marilyn Rigler (*Language* 50.528–54); R. M. W. Dixon's aforementioned 1979 article; David Dowty's 1991 article 'Thematic proto-roles and argument selection' (*Language* 67.547–619); and, not surprisingly, given the recent surge of scholarly and popular interest in language endangerment, the 1992 piece 'Endangered languages' by Ken Hale, Michael Krauss, Lucille J. Watahomigie, Akira Y. Yamamoto, Colette Craig, LaVerne Masayesva Jeanne, and Nora C. England (*Language* 68.1–42). These measures must surely be considered crude—citation numbers, for instance, are not necessarily a reflection of quality or extent of influence, and in any case, older papers have had more chances to be cited and requested than more recent ones—but nonetheless they perhaps offer some objective metric for showing which works have withstood the test of time and continue to be relevant and useful.

I have no doubt that all readers of this journal can think of other papers that have appeared in *Language* that have made a difference in their own research, teaching, or thinking over the years. I would love to hear of them. I am not proposing a popularity contest and am not about to compile a top ten list of *Language*'s greatest hits or anything of the sort, but occasional comments about influential papers and their impact would be interesting and useful for me to learn about (and maybe even to write about in a subsequent column). Are there papers from the early days that are still important (like Bloomfield's, in my view)? Are only the most recent papers of value?<sup>6</sup> To what extent do we direct students to papers in *Language* as opposed to other journals? And so on—as always, I look forward to your comments.

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting in this regard that among JSTOR's top twenty-five articles viewed or printed on-line for 2003 are Leonard Bloomfield's 1926 'A set of postulates for the science of language' (*Language* 2.163–64), Charles F. Hockett's 1942 'A system of descriptive phonology' (*Language* 18.3–21), and Ward H. Goodenough's 1956 'Componential analysis and the study of meaning' (*Language* 32.195–216).