

## THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

**A styled farewell and a new era: The purpose, history, and future of the  
*Language* style sheet**

I have in part used this section of the journal to signal passages and milestones of one sort or another, and such is the case now. As of this writing, just past the halfway mark of my editorship, we have now exhausted the paper copies of the *Language* style sheets, printed in 1995, that I inherited from the previous editor. Just as *Language* editors before me did, I have been sending these to authors whose papers are accepted (since January 2002, nearly eighty all told).

This is the passing of an era because the style sheet will not be reprinted; rather we will rely on the web version ([www.lsadc.org/language/langstyl.html](http://www.lsadc.org/language/langstyl.html)) as the sole means of guidance for authors in preparing the final manuscript of their accepted papers according to *Language*'s strict requirements. Even the annual appearance of the style sheet in the *LSA Bulletin* (beginning in 1962, usually in the last issue but once (1971) in the September issue) will not provide a paper back-up anymore because the *Bulletin* will be web-based/electronic-only starting with the next issue.<sup>1</sup>

This set of circumstances has set me to thinking about style sheets in general and about the *Language* style sheet in particular. From almost the very start of *Language*, not surprisingly, there was a style sheet. The second issue of volume 1 (1925) contained, on pages 61–62, a set of 'Suggestions to contributors', written for the Committee on Publications by George M. Bolling (chairman of the committee and editor of *Language*), along with Aurelio Espinosa and Edward Sapir (as committee members and the equivalent of associate editors for the journal, inasmuch as their names appear on the cover below Bolling's). In keeping with the pioneering spirit behind the launching of the *LSA* and *Language*, these pages have first some general guidelines about length, method, terminology, and use of phonetic alphabets (that of the Association Phonétique Internationale is recommended), all of which are aimed at enunciating 'a plan that will make for economy and at the same time effect a certain uniformity on the treatment of linguistic problems in print'. Following that are several specific recommendations on points of style. Some of these general guidelines are valid for all time (e.g. 'directness and succinctness of method is recommended'<sup>2</sup>) and some of the specifics have remained with us to the present day (e.g. 'references with two or more numerals should have periods and not commas between the numerals; thus *MLN* 3.41 means volume 3, page 41'), while others we have now changed (e.g. that 'all passages and single words in languages other than French and German are to be immediately followed by their translations into English'—French and German passages are now also translated (see my June 2004 Editor's Department 'On change in *Language* and change in language' (80.3.381–83)).

<sup>1</sup> The *Bulletin* has a venerable history of its own, which I hope to discuss in another column, but briefly, it has been published since December of 1926, more or less annually till 1970 and in four issues a year since then. Still, the call of technology is hard to ignore, so, as noted in the June 2005 *Bulletin* (No. 188), 'The June 2005 *LSA Bulletin* will be the last bulletin published in paper format. Beginning with the first issue . . . in the new fiscal year (beginning October 2005), the bulletin will be available on-line at the *LSA* website' ([www.lsadc.org](http://www.lsadc.org)).

<sup>2</sup> With an interesting verb agreement that I personally would edit to *are* (though I, and others no doubt, are guilty too of the same agreement pattern—see my *Morphology and universals in syntactic change*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1990, p. xvi for a similarly constructed sentence of my own making).

A second style sheet ('The preparation of copy for printing: Instructions to contributors') appeared in 1936, not in the journal itself but in the *Bulletin*, No. 9, by then a 'Supplement to *Language*', associated with volume 12 of the journal. It is fuller than the first one, six pages in all, and covers more stylistic territory. A third version of the style sheet, with the same title as before but this time seven pages long, came out in 1941, again in the *Bulletin*, No. 14. The style sheet in its now-familiar form, and officially named as such, was first published in the *Bulletin* in 1962 (No. 35), where it has appeared annually ever since, as noted above.

These earlier style sheets are a treasure trove of interesting trivia and tidbits about the journal and about academic life in the first few decades of the LSA and of *Language*. Besides the references, now of curiosity value only, to the quality of typewriter ribbons to be used (avoid ribbons that are 'old and dry') and the need to triple-space instead of double-space with specific varieties of typewriter,<sup>3</sup> I mention here three items that struck me as particularly intriguing.

1. Perhaps the most arcane line in all of the *Language* style sheets, past and present, is the statement concerning the use of boldface type that occurs in the 1962 style sheet and in all subsequent versions: 'Use **boldface** for certain forms in Oscan and Umbrian, and to distinguish Gaulish and other forms originally written in the Greek alphabet'.<sup>4</sup> The seeds for this dictum are to be found in the 1941 style sheet where one finds the recognition that 'special conventions applying to particular languages may be followed at the author's discretion' and a footnote that exemplifies such special conventions with 'the use of boldface type for Oscan and Umbrian'. Given that Warren Cowgill, a noted Indo-Europeanist, was named as the editor of the 1962 *Bulletin* on its cover and served at the time as a member of the LSA's Committee on Publications (and thus essentially as an associate editor for *Language*), it seems safe to assume that he can be identified as the source of the form of the stricture about boldface and Oscan and Umbrian, as well as of the embellishment adding the further caution about Gaulish.

2. The current style sheet is a no-nonsense document with pertinent information but little else, which is of course fine, since its purpose is to provide authors with relevant stylistic information. But one sees in the earliest style sheets some of the editors' personalities coming through in framing comments they included. For instance, the 1925 one ends with the following: 'Careful observance of these suggestions will greatly lighten the labors of the Committee on Publications'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the last section of the 1936 version makes a serious point but ends with a seemingly light touch:

XVII. THE FINISHING TOUCH: When the typescript has been prepared in conformity with these instructions, go through it thoughtfully and strike out every word which fails to contribute something to the argument; eliminate rhetoric, and make of it a concise, business-like presentation of facts, argument, and conclusions. Then send it to the Editor.

And, that lightness is reinforced by the postscript that immediately follows: 'PS: The Editor and the Business Manager have done this with these Instructions'.

<sup>3</sup> Triple-spacing is prescribed in *Language* 1.61 (1925) if one is using a Hammond (a typewriter introduced in 1884 that became a successful early rival to the Remington Standard of 1878; see [www.typewritermuseum.org](http://www.typewritermuseum.org) for a fascinating look at early typewriters and typewriting).

<sup>4</sup> What is referred to here regarding Oscan and Umbrian is the practice of using boldface to signal the use in inscriptions in these languages of the native alphabets (respectively, Oscan and Umbrian), as opposed to the Latin alphabet, which was also used for both languages, or to the Greek alphabet, used for some Oscan inscriptions; see p. xvii of Carl Darling Buck's 1928 *A grammar of Oscan and Umbrian* (Boston, MA: Ginn and Co.) on this convention, and pp. 22–29 on the alphabets.

<sup>5</sup> The Publication Committee seems to have performed much of the work that the editors and editorial staff for the journal now do, so to this sentiment, I can only add 'Amen'!

3. There is evidence of a concern for a suitably elevated level of discourse in the pages of the journal. Section XVI of the 1936 style sheet, under the heading of 'ENGLISH', states:

Scientific writing should be clothed in dignified standard English. Be careful of the form in which you present your work; nothing is gained, and something is lost, by the use of words or locutions at which even a few readers will take offense.

In this statement we may see the seeds too of some of the motivation behind the *LSA guidelines for nonsexist usage* (first enunciated in the *Bulletin*, No. 138 (1992), with reference to it now built into the style sheet).

It is worth considering here what style sheets are good for, other than plaguing authors with a myriad of details. The 1936 style sheet has a nice statement about its purpose; in particular, following the instructions to contributors 'will relieve the Editor of much labor in preparing the copy for the printer; will reduce the charges paid by the Society or by the Author for proof-corrections; will cause the Author's views to be presented more effectively; and will aid in maintaining the Society's standard of quality in its publications'. Although we do not (now) charge authors for needed corrections at the proofing stage, the other points still hold.

Moreover, the style sheet, now at least, is really a set of guidelines for authors of ACCEPTED papers to follow, as it was decided during the previous editor's term to allow papers to be submitted in any format (see Mark Aronoff's Editor's Department in *Language* 73.4.909, 1997). We still work with hard copy in preparing accepted manuscripts for the printer, and this fact explains some of the aspects of the current style sheet that might seem old-fashioned or outmoded. For example, the style sheet continues to make reference to underscores for indicating *italics*, double underscores for SMALL CAPITALS, and so on, and reference is made to the use of endnotes and not footnotes; all of these are standard aspects of the type-setting process. This of course means that the *Language* style sheet taken literally does not define a style for others to follow (as students and scholars are sometimes encouraged to do by teachers or editors). But if one works with the spirit of the style sheet rather than its letter, regarding for instance the use of italics rather than the typographical marking of italics, then the style sheet can be a model for others to follow, with attention paid to how the style appears on the pages of the journal itself.

The style sheet is an evolving document, whether existing on paper or in cyberspace, and instantiations of it in the next few years may well incorporate some changes. To some extent, as with the use now of italics for book and journal titles,<sup>6</sup> they may reflect the attempts on the part of several journal editors in our field, working as a group, as mentioned in this space in the September 2004 issue (80.3), to develop some stylistic uniformity across the journals in our discipline. This is an ongoing process that is yielding some positive results but also some disagreements, as might be expected.

Still, *Language* has had a characteristic 'look' since its inception, with regard, for instance, to the types of items published—especially articles, reviews, and a publications received list—and to the form of its cover, which has changed little over the past eighty-one years, with the same color, the same plain background, the same placement of and lettering for *Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America*, and so on.

<sup>6</sup> This change away from the style that prevailed for several decades is mentioned in my June 2004 Editor's Department (p. 381). Italics were used in the early days in bibliographic references, but at that time references were generally put in footnotes and only later began to be listed in a reference section at the end of an article. Thus we are actually partly returning to a previous practice with this 'new' aspect of our style.

What also contributes to the *Language* look, though, is the style and formatting within the covers, that is, the layout, the standard typeface, the use of unruled tables, and in general the relatively 'down', somewhat spare, style with, for instance, little use of capitalization in the text and in references. These traits in large part reflect the sensibilities of the early editors and they have served the journal well, indeed aiding in some small way, through a consistent professional look, in fulfilling the above-quoted goal of 'maintaining the Society's standard of quality in its publications'.

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