

THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

A first take on the editorial and production process

With this issue of *Language*, the first, transitional, year in my editorship is half over (though I feel some days as if much more time has elapsed!). As is inevitable and customary in such transitions, given the exigencies of the production schedule for the journal, this issue (as the one before it) only partly represents the efforts of my editorial team, since all the articles contained herein were reviewed and accepted under Mark Aronoff, the previous editor. Thus, like (at least some) change in language, change in *Language* is gradual. And, as with transitions in language, even with the abrupt break of the relocation of the editorial offices to Columbus, one can see both stability and continuity in the transition in *Language*. For instance, most of the associate editors—who by the way do extraordinary service to the profession with their diligent work interpreting referees' reports and making recommendations to me on submissions—have terms that began prior to and continue into and/or beyond this year, and virtually all others who have been involved in the behind-the-scenes work on the production of *Language* (copyeditors, compositors, printers, etc.) are still on the job. Finally, I have benefitted greatly already from the considerable help the previous editors have offered me on a variety of matters.

With this many people involved in the journal (and there are others not specifically mentioned here), the whole process of putting an issue together may seem somewhat mysterious. That is perhaps a curious observation, since most of us in academia are intimately involved with academic journals in one way or another. However, that involvement is mostly as contributors or as consumers. While typically we spend considerable time reading articles in journals and writing articles for journals, on the whole we spend far less time with other aspects pertaining to journals, such as the evaluation of papers (as part of the peer-review process), and even less, in the usual case, with the actual editing of journals and producing of an issue.

The matter of producing a journal has been taken up in the past by my two immediate predecessors in this very forum, during their editorships (see Thomason 1990, *Language* 66:891–94, with some important comments on the review process, and Aronoff 1999, *Language* 75:412–16, with his reflections on the editor's need to make choices), and to be sure, the process has not changed dramatically since last described herein. Nonetheless, perhaps because I have been working through *Language*'s procedures in the past few months as part of my steep learning curve and finally feel that I understand them, I think it appropriate to share some of the intricacies of the process with you, the readers of the journal. Thus, over the next few instantiations of this section of the journal I plan to discuss the various steps in the editorial process, from both the author's perspective and the editor's perspective.

It is useful first to review the different types of pieces that appear in *Language*. Thomason 1993 (*Language* 69:639–43) gives an excellent overview of various submitted items that I cannot improve upon, so I quote liberally from it here, with some added remarks of my own.

The mainstay of each issue is the article, typically a paper of no more than fifty manuscript pages, focused on presenting results of original research (as opposed to reviewing and summarizing findings of others) involving new interpretations of known data, the discovery of new data, the testing of hypotheses and claims made elsewhere, and so on. Shorter papers are encouraged; longer papers are considered but may present problems that get in the way of their acceptance (see below). All article submissions are subject to rigorous review by outside experts (referees, sometimes also referred to as reviewers); a fuller discussion of the review process is planned for another issue. The range of topics covered by articles is broad, and thus the range of submissions is broad. As Thomason explains, ‘all subfields and all theoretical approaches are appropriate for submission . . . however, articles are appropriate for *Language* only if they hold potential interest for linguists in all subfields of the discipline; an article that would be read primarily or only by specialists in a particular subfield should be submitted to a specialist journal instead of *Language*. In practice, an article has potential general interest if it makes original (and convincing) theoretical, methodological, or typological proposals’, or if it interprets historical problems in the development of the field in an original and enlightening way. This notion of being of ‘general interest’ is a tricky one, and warrants further discussion in a future column.

It should be said as well that the article should be submitted in a form that is complete and polished. The author(s) should be satisfied with it in the form it is submitted—if revisions are called for by the referees, the associate editor, or me, so be it; but authors themselves should submit a paper that they feel needs no revisions.

With regard to the style and format of the submission, at this stage in the process it need not follow the *Language* Style Sheet (available as a link on the *Language* web site (<http://www.lsadc.org/language>) and published each year in the December issue of the LSA *Bulletin*) but if the article gets accepted, authors will be expected to adhere strictly to *Language* style in preparing the final form of the manuscript (failure to do so may result in delays in getting the paper into print).

Regarding the manner of submission, we do not accept electronic submissions; they place an unfair burden on the *Language* staff dealing with the paper in that form and undue expense on the *Language* office for costs of paper and toner (since eventually hard copy is needed). Moreover, given the vagaries of dealing with fonts and formatting with at least some types of attachments, authors could not be sure that what we would print out would be exactly what they intended.

Language also considers various types of shorter pieces; the most common of these is the Discussion Note. As Thomason explains, ‘These are brief contributions of 2500 words or less. Sometimes they are invited by the editor, but notes may also be (and often are) submitted like regular articles. Unless the editor is able to evaluate them, they will be sent to one or more referees. The most common types of notes are discussions of points made by other authors in the journal (see, for instance, the notes by Schourup & Tamori in *Lg.* 68/1 [1992] and Dorian in this issue [69.3]) and reports on issues which are of general interest to linguists but which do not fit easily elsewhere in the journal (e.g. Nunberg’s note on the English Only movement in *Lg.* 65/3 [1989] and Ladefoged’s report on the IPA revision in *Lg.* 66/3 [1990]).’

In addition, under Mark Aronoff’s editorship, a new type of short piece, called the Descriptive Report (sometimes referred to as a Short Report), was instituted. These are ‘short descriptive articles (no more than 5000 words or ten published pages) on interesting and unusual findings in languages. These papers will include presentation of data and patterns that appear to be generally important theoretically or historically, or discussion of patterns that are new for a given language or area’ (*Language* 72.673–74).

A final type of shorter item (final in more ways than one) is the obituary. *Language's* long-standing policy is that obituaries in the journal normally are reserved only for LSA presidents. These are generally invited pieces but anyone thinking of or interested in writing one should contact the editor directly.

For me as editor, short and concise articles are a blessing, as they allow for the greatest flexibility in putting together an issue, but also, more importantly, offer the possibility of a greater number of linguists having their work appear in the journal (and this is, after all, the journal of the Linguistic Society of America, and thus it is open in principle to all practicing linguists). For authors, shorter papers mean the likelihood of a speedier review (referees are only human, and even the most gripping ninety-page manuscript still has ninety pages one has to turn, read, and digest!).

Let me reiterate here as well the invitation in this space in the March issue (78.1) for the submission of letters (brief but pithy statements and/or opinions, possibly provocative in nature, about some phenomenon or claim, ideally one that is current and hot, on the lips of linguists everywhere).

The other types of contributed pieces involve reviewing of the field in some way, most typically focusing on published books; here I draw on the excellent descriptions provided by the current Review Editor, Stanley Dubinsky, on the *Language* Review website (www.cla.sc.edu/LING/Language_Book_Reviews.html): ‘*Book notices* are short descriptions of a book’s content, and are typically about 500 words. These are written by individuals who volunteer to do so by submitting a request for the book to the Review Editor. *Language* typically publishes about 200 book notices each year. Unsolicited book notices are allowed, but in sending an unsolicited notice, the author of such is taking the risk that the book in question may have already been assigned to someone else. *Book reviews* are 1200–2000 word pieces that summarize the content of the volume, assess its quality, and note its contribution to the field. Book reviews are commissioned by the Review Editor in consultation with the Editor and Associate Editors of the journal. The journal typically publishes about 50 reviews each year. Unsolicited reviews are discouraged. However, *Language* will entertain requests, suggestions, or proposals from potential reviewers and consider these on a case-by-case basis. Such individuals should first contact the Review Editor . . . *Review articles* are longer pieces that are called for by some ‘event’, such as the publication of a particularly important book or a series of books that are related, or by a need to provide a summation over some topic of crucial interest. These are commissioned by the Journal Editor (rather than the Review Editor) and are subject to the peer review process. Review articles are rather infrequent, and unsolicited review articles are generally not accepted. Individuals wishing to propose a review article should first contact the Journal Editor’.

Finally, there are some miscellaneous items that round out issues. Each issue has a Publications Received section, a simple catalogue of books and journals that have been sent unsolicited to the *Language* editorial office or to the office of the review editor. It serves an informational function to the field at large (and provides the basis for the list of books available for Book Notices, posted on the *Language* Review website).¹

¹ References to *Language's* website demand some clarification. The *Language* website is to be found via a link from the LSA's website (www.lsadc.org). It is currently in the process of being updated to reflect the changes in the editorial staff and other recent developments (such as the publication of issues in the past few years whose tables of contents should be listed) but technical difficulties have slowed that process (so that parts are out of date still as of this writing and may remain so for some time). An alternative website just for review-related material, currently maintained by Stanley Dubinsky, is in place, and viewable at www.cla.sc.edu/LING/Language_Book_Reviews.html. It will eventually be incorporated into the official *Language* website once that is fully viable.

The final issue of each year has a cumulative index for all four issues of the volume; the index lists all authors of articles, reviews, book notices, short (descriptive) reports, discussion notes, and obituaries, all authors and titles of books reviewed (either in full reviews or book notices), and all article titles.² I also plan to have an Editor's Department in each issue, even though not all issues in recent years have had one, and I hope to use this forum in a substantive way, to educate the readership about the workings of the journal and to offer reflections from time to time on the field and on the journal. Finally, there are occasional notices of relevance to the workings of the Linguistic Society of America and *Language*, such as the Editor's Report (see Mark Aronoff's final report in this issue; these in general now are published in the June issue of each year, since the March issue is put together in December, before the report is officially filed with the executive committee at the annual meeting).

Enough with this—more will be found in the issues to come on what happens with submissions, but for now, this is sufficient; on to REAL linguistics in the pages of the journal!

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² A cumulative index of *Language* in the twentieth century is being prepared under the direction of Mark Aronoff, with the expectation that it will be ready for distribution within a year's time.