

## THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

### On change in *Language* and change in language

Language change, we are taught, is inevitable, and so too, it seems, is *Language* change, that is, changes of one sort or another in this journal. Being a historical linguist, I reflect on and confront changes in language on an almost daily basis and thus can't help but be struck by the ways in which changes in *Language* that have been instituted in recent months, as detailed below, mirror change in language. Like language change, they are in part arbitrary, they often fit into existing patterns, they are to some extent (but not entirely) functionally driven, they sometimes reflect changes in a larger social enterprise, and so on. Each one is a discrete innovation, perhaps small in scope and maybe even virtually unnoticeable by itself; yet, when taken together they can add up to a subtle shift in the character of the journal, though not a radical one—that is, there clearly is continuity with preceding instantiations of *Language*.

Without wanting to overstate such parallels, I feel it is useful to chronicle these changes for you, the journal's readership:

1. Beginning to use italics for books, journals, and dissertations in the references at the end of articles and reviews: for years, in fact, since the middle of 1966 when William Bright (taking over as editor after Bernard Bloch's death) changed the format for references from the footnoted variety seen in the journal from its 1925 inception to their collective placement at the end of the article, *Language*, virtually alone among major journals in our field, has had a very 'down' style in its references, that is, with no quotation marks or italics. This format posed a 'parsing' problem in some instances, as it was not always clear where a chapter or article title ended and where the title of the book, journal, or proceedings volume containing it began; moreover, the title of a volume might seem like a subtitle for an article, or vice-versa, adding to the potential confusion. As a boundary marker between article/chapter and volume, we have introduced in this issue italics for book and journal titles.<sup>1</sup> This move has the added benefit of bringing *Language* more in line with the style used in a good many other journals in the field, and thus is a step, admittedly a small one, towards a uniform discipline-wide standard format.<sup>2</sup>

2. Alphabetizing the book notice table of contents by book title: we started doing this a few issues ago but have now refined our technique so that the table of contents is always alphabetized (and generally the order of notices in the pages of the journal is likewise); this step allows readers to see at a glance if a book that interests them is given a notice. The presentation of this information has changed over the years: for a number of years (into the late 1980s), there was generally no alphabetizing by author or title, and then for several years (at least up through 1996) there was alphabetizing by book author; more recently, there was alphabetizing by book notice author, which

<sup>1</sup> The use of italics of course is not restricted just to titles posing a potential parsing problem; for the sake of consistency (and thus—perhaps pushing the parallel to language change a bit too far—by analogy, it can be said, to books with cited chapters), this stylistic change is extended to cover all book titles and dissertations even in the absence of the functional motivation of a parsing advantage. The other (functional and societal) motivation of working towards a discipline-wide style is of course well served by this extension.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this very topic has been among the items for discussion at informal gatherings of journal editors at the annual meeting of the LSA the past two years; I would welcome input from any editor in our field on this matter (or related ones), pro or con.

seems less useful. Thus, in this case, we are undoing a change, as it were, and reverting to a presentation style found earlier.

These changes have a clear functional basis, being motivated by a desire to make these parts of the journal (references and book notices) more ‘reader/user-friendly’. Other changes respond to changes in society at large, regarding technology and professional training:

3. Beginning to ask for electronic versions of hard copy submissions (thus altering the stance I enunciated in this column in *Language* 78.2.218, 2002, where we explicitly asked for no electronic versions); note that we still ask for hard copy as electronic copies are not infallible (with potential for font problems, unopenable files, and the like). These ‘e-submissions’ can facilitate aspects of the review process and thus seem to be an important step forward into the twenty-first century.

4. Another technologically motivated move: expansion of the journal’s website ([www.lsadc.org/language](http://www.lsadc.org/language)) to include a link listing forthcoming articles (next issue and issues beyond) and their abstracts.

In addition, there is yet another change, nontechnological in its basis:

5. In the article by John Anderson in this issue, longish passages originally in French are translated into English, instead of being left in the original. Here we are bowing to the reality that not all readers of *Language* now can be expected to be able to read French. It simply seems to be a fact that the nature of scholarship and training in linguistics has changed so that knowledge of French is no longer *de rigueur* (though I hasten to add that in my experience those trained today end up with a vast array of other skills—French just happens not to necessarily be among them).

This last point leads me, with some slight trepidation,<sup>3</sup> to make a comment on our field in general, an informal observation based largely on a number of papers I have read as submissions in recent months. In particular, we seem to be witnessing as well a shift in the way some linguists find and utilize data—many papers now use corpora as their primary data, and many use internet data. These are clearly changes that are technologically induced, and in an era in which *google* is now a common verb,<sup>4</sup> why not? I feel compelled to add, though, *caveat googlator!* One thing that my philological training has taught me is that not all attestations are alike in terms of quality, significance, and trustworthiness. In the culling of data from Medieval Greek texts for my dissertation, in a pre-computer and pre-electronic-corpus era (1978),<sup>5</sup> I ran across some examples of weak pronoun placement in certain future tense constructions<sup>6</sup> that I felt

<sup>3</sup> I do this even though I was explicitly warned early on in my term as editor, in a letter from a prominent and well-intentioned senior figure congratulating me on my new position and on my first ‘Editor’s Department’ column (in *Language* 78.1, 2002), that I ought not to produce any further such columns as they could well be ‘a virus and a highly dangerous one’, especially if I were to make observations on the field itself! Thus, *caveat lector*, and, perhaps as well, *caveat editor!*

<sup>4</sup> As noted widely, but see, for the record perhaps, the editorial ‘Googling Google’, from the *New York Times* of Sunday May 2, 2004, where it is noted that ‘a verb made from its [Google’s] name has become a part of the lexicon’.

<sup>5</sup> *Morphology and universals in syntactic change: Evidence from Medieval and Modern Greek* (Harvard University dissertation, 1978); printed and distributed by Indiana University Linguistics Club (1978); published in an expanded and updated version by Garland Publishers (1990).

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, those consisting of an inflected form of the verb *thélo* ‘want’ used as an auxiliary-like element marking futurity (and thus meaning ‘will’ in this collocation) together with an inflected ‘main’ verb, for example, *thélo gráfo* ‘I will write’ (= will.1SG write.1SG).

were best treated as having been altered, whether by author or scribe, at line-end. These alternations created better rhyming, but in doing so, produced otherwise odd and unexpected positioning of pronouns. Thus I considered them to be attested but ungrammatical—some examples obtained on the internet in papers I read now strike me as quite the same, that is, possibly produced by nonnative speakers, or typed quickly and thus reflecting performance errors, and so on. I have no doubt that we will learn how to deal with this new data source effectively (and indeed some forthcoming papers citing internet data do a good job of controlling as much as possible for such confounding effects).

The changes in *Language*, I trust, are changes for the better, edging the journal closer to the nirvana of the 'perfect journal' as defined by Geoffrey Pullum (1984);<sup>7</sup> the changes in the field, as I said above, are simply that, changes in the way we do business—our general sense of standards for quality, driven by the same desire for research and knowledge exhibited by countless linguists throughout the history of the profession, should ultimately ensure that these changes too will be for the better.

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<sup>7</sup> The feature in question is 'announcements of articles to appear in forthcoming issues', and is number eight in his list of nine criteria on which he rated journals in this 1984 piece ('Stalking the perfect journal', *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 2.161–67; note that this feature was abandoned as a criterion for journal perfection in his 1987 follow-up piece, 'Seven deadly sins in journal publishing', *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 3.453–59). While our listing is technically not in the journal but on our website, I am confident that the web listing suffices for fulfilling this desideratum.