

## THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

### With all due respect . . .

I knew coming into the job of editor that I would spend considerable time on articles and reviews, but one aspect that has surprised me somewhat is the number of obituaries that I have overseen in my two-plus years as editor (eight so far, extending into the coming June issue, with more to come). I simply had not given much thought to obituaries before this. However, I have found them to be intriguing and compelling pieces that have drawn me into a consideration of the history of the field and of the LSA, prompting these thoughts.

For all the fact that in our professional lives as linguists and academics we deal in data and ideas, we also deal in—and with—people. The data come from people, the ideas come from people, and the skills to deal with data and ideas come from people. A letter such as the one from Andrew Carnie (see p. 1) about the late Ken Hale reminds us poignantly of the influence that one person can have—in a positive way—over others, and indeed the power that a person can wield in shaping lives; certainly many of us in this profession can point to individuals, often major figures in the field, who have affected us in similar ways.

Ideas and data have a permanence that a person does not; they live on long beyond their formulator, creator, collector, or codifier. It is partly for that reason, I believe, that it is important to recognize people by means of obituaries,<sup>1</sup> a type of contribution to this journal that has an interesting history of its own.

In the early days of *Language* and of the LSA, obituary notices appeared in the journal for all members of the LSA and were often just brief reminders of details of a person's life; they were part of the regular 'Notes and Personalia' section of the journal. Perhaps a bit curiously, as the LSA had not had much time to gain members let alone lose them, obituaries began with the very first issue in the spring of 1925;<sup>2</sup> the first obituary notice was of Henry Alfred Todd, who died six days after giving a paper at the first LSA meeting (held December 28, 1924). Many of these brief notices were written by Roland Kent, who had presided over that first LSA meeting and who served the Society as secretary-treasurer for the first sixteen years of its existence.<sup>3</sup> Though most were short, some of these notices were substantial, such as the one of Maurice Bloomfield (uncle of Leonard Bloomfield and a noted Sanskritist), second president of the LSA (1926), that appeared in *Language* 4.214–17 (1928) and is attributed to George M. Bolling (first editor of the journal) in the journal's *Twentieth-century index 1925–2000*. The first full separate obituary was the one written by Morris Swadesh of another LSA president, Edward Sapir, appearing in *Language* 15.132–36 (1939). After issue 16.2 (middle of 1940), the 'Notes and Personalia' section was

<sup>1</sup> There can of course be obituaries of nonhumans, even of inanimate or abstract entities; for instance, Peter Mackridge's 'Katharevousa (c. 1800–1974): An obituary for an official language' (*Background to contemporary Greece*, ed. by Marion Sarafis and M. Eve, 25–51, London: Merlin Press, 1990) is an 'obituary' of katharevousa, the puristic variety of Modern Greek given up officially in Greece after the fall of the junta in 1974.

<sup>2</sup> The exact date of publication of the first issue seems not to be directly recorded in or on the journal itself; as best I can tell, *Language* 1.1 must have appeared after March 31, 1925 (the closing date given in the list of Foundation Members, p. 26) and not long after that, as the next enumeration (p. 68, in issue 1.2) gives April 8 as its cut-off date.

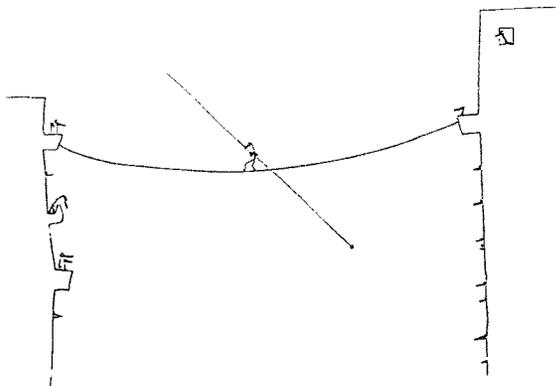
<sup>3</sup> Till 1940; he was LSA President in 1941. His obituary, written by George S. Lane, was published in *Language* 29.1–13 (1953).

replaced by a section labeled just 'Notes' that contained no real obituary notices, only mention of the passing of LSA members.

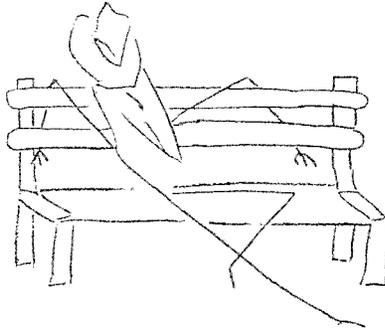
Presumably it was not possible to continue even this practice in later years, as the profession and the society grew and perhaps as the nature and function of the journal changed to some extent, and obituaries came to be more of the sort found of Maurice Bloomfield and Edward Sapir, that is, more substantive pieces focused on leading linguists.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in recent years, attention in obituaries has focused mainly on LSA Presidents, though other leaders who were major contributors to the society and to the profession have been recognized as well. This seems altogether appropriate since, taken together, these figures constitute a remarkable set of linguists, and commemoration of their lives in the pages of *Language* is in keeping with its being the journal of record both for the LSA and, in some sense, for the discipline as well.

Obituaries thus offer a chance to show a respect for history. Yet, good professional obituaries, unlike the purely journalistic ones that appear shortly after someone's death in newspapers, can take a long time to write. The crafting of words that put a finality to a person's life can be a painful process for the writer, but can possibly be cathartic as well, so these pieces eventually are completed, often as a final act of remembrance, perhaps even reverence, and generally, also, friendship and love, inasmuch as the author is usually is a student or close friend or colleague. In that they may involve students, obituaries can symbolically show continuity in life and in academia.

The individuals whose lives are chronicled in obituaries in *Language* were certainly remarkable linguists, but it is interesting to note how often other sides of them are revealed in the pages of the obituary, showing that they were remarkable in other respects. To take but two recent examples, Jim McCawley, for instance, was, as John Lawler reminds us (*Language* 79.614–25), a published connoisseur of fine food and a gifted musician; Charles Hockett, too, was a skilled musician and composer, and, as James Gair notes in *Language* 79.600–613, a fiction writer and poet as well. In that vein, I close here with evidence of a different talent on the part of one remarkable linguist, the focus of an obituary in this issue (pp. 142–52), in the form of some drawings from the pen of Robert Austerlitz (LSA President in 1990). As Daniel Abondolo points out in this issue (p. 143), Austerlitz was a talented sketcher, and used drawings for elicitation in some of his field work and illustrated his field notes with sketches; reproduced here are a few from lighter moments, sent to me by Karl Zimmer, linguist and long-time friend of Austerlitz—once I saw them, displaying them here became a must, so enjoy!



<sup>4</sup> The passing of members is now noted in the LSA Bulletin, however.



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