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Miscellaneous

An interview with Björn H. Jernudd

Biographical sketch

Much was changing in Sweden in the 1960s. What had not yet changed was the educational system. I chose the classic languages option and graduated with Latin and Greek in grammar school – and no mathematics, or physics. That I made up for in the summers following. We were two boys among all girls! The then compulsory military service gave me Russian (and other skills). It didn't take much extra study to be examined in Slavic languages in civil life at Uppsala university which gave me half a university degree. The other half became phonetics, a fortunate choice because the professor, U. G. E. Hammarström, taught just as much linguistics in a Saussurean vein as phonetics. Otherwise, there was philology in the languages departments and, I took a semester's worth, Sanskrit with comparative Indo-European!

I solved the study problem by self-study and, through an American society, applying for a summer at the Linguistic Institute, in 1963 hosted by the University of Washington in Seattle. I was successful and the experience was truly transformative. Once back in Stockholm I got permission to be specially examined by Professor Bertil Malmberg in Lund. We agreed on a curriculum; I passed and became the first person with a linguistics degree. Shortly thereafter, I was called to the office of the rector of Stockholm University who assumed I would continue towards higher degrees, mentioned that the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies was coming into existence and that it offered scholarships – Sudan would be a suitable fieldwork site. I found a topic, I found locations, I got the money and ended up in Darfur.

While in Darfur, Sudan, I received a letter from U. G. E. Hammarström. He had moved to Monash University, Melbourne, to head up the Modern Languages Department – being fed up with petty and out of date academe in Uppsala. Prior, he had taken a personal interest in my development. Professor Hammarström offered me my first regular position as lecturer in linguistics. I left for Melbourne a year later, having finished my *civilekonom* at the Stockholm School of Economics. Parallel with starting on a teaching career, Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman had invited me to the Airlie House conference on language in developing nations, in 1966. There I met J. V. Neustupný from, of all places, Monash University! He had been recruited as professor of Japanese at this young university. This encounter led to a lifelong col-

laboration. The US connection led to some twelve years altogether at the East-West Center in Honolulu, three years with the Ford Foundation out of Cairo (although my continuous work in the Sudan had a lot to do with that assignment) and several years formally affiliated with Stanford University during the International Research Project on Language Planning Processes. Eventually, after five years as a visitor at the National University of Singapore and a short year as a returnee to Australia, I served out my teaching career at the Hong Kong Baptist University as Chair Professor of Linguistics. After an early but compulsory retirement, I followed my wife to Beijing and Washington DC. Meanwhile, the language management group in Prague adopted me, to my honor and delight. Thanks to the Prague School's endorsement, I continue an active involvement in the study of behavior toward language.

What is the most unproductive concept/idea that has come out of sociolinguistic research in the last 10 years in your view, and why?

My concern is not time bound. Rather, I am concerned about a recurring issue. It appears to be unavoidable that colleagues in sociolinguistics get carried away by their views on how societies should be linguistically constituted. For example, as an editor of the *Language Planning Newsletter*, I felt obliged to reject (or suggest modifications to) submissions that laid out and advocated for a particular language policy. I did not want the newsletter to become a channel for individual political views. Other concerns of an undisguised political nature are how colleagues engage in heated arguments about the use and promotion of English in states far and wide, about a proposed spelling system or change in spelling, or about borrowing from other languages. For sociolinguists in their researcher/academic capacity to take sides is in my view highly problematic. A particular individual may of course declare which interest they support and express that in a suitable context; or a particular individual may work as an officer in a language management agency, thus wearing two hats, in which case advocacy for particular work-related solutions belongs to the work environment, and not to the scholarly environment. Each role has its appropriate outlet. To describe, analyze and explain contestation of usages is of course fine.

What are the major changes that the field has undergone during your career?

Institutionally, sociolinguistics has found its place as one branch of linguistics since its emergence in the 1960s. Charles Ferguson participated in the 1963 Linguistic Institute at the University of Washington, Seattle and taught a sociolinguistics course. Note that 1963 was also the year the Social Science Research Council formed

its Committee on sociolinguistics with Ferguson as chair. The course held by Ferguson in Seattle was, if not the first sociolinguistic class to be taught in a linguistics program, at least one of the very few first. I was a student in that class. Now, sociolinguistics courses are legion.

Intellectually I don't see major change. Individual researchers select their work, then as now in the context within which they find themselves. How their selection is determined is a complex socio-academic process; there is no reason to think that at base, thoughts and ideas ranged over a narrower content set, then, than is the case now.

In the early 60s, not only approaches to how language (and languages) are studied in the Swedish academe changed course, but also what topics should be added to or even replace what fell under the label ethnography. Ulf Hannerz led the way among contemporaries to advocate for, to give a briefest characterization, social anthropology. He convened like-minded students. This venue gave me an audience among peers and I gave a short presentation on *språksociologi* ('the sociology of language'), then published in their bulletin (as Jernudd 1964). My scope, now that I read it, was on both language behavior and behavior toward language; I touched on sociolinguistic variables, dialectal variables, repertoires, language situations, language contact, language development, and decision-making regarding language. And it's striking that a change from ethnography into social anthropology was happening in Sweden concurrently.

This insight, that "nothing is new under the sun", was brought home to me very early. My youthful pride in having conducted a sociolinguistic survey of use of slang expressions in the Stockholm area in 1964 (together with my classmate at the Stockholm School of Economics, Tommy Willingson) wasn't totally deflated, but definitely majorly tempered by my then phonetics professor's, Claes Christian Elert (Stockholm University), comment that I/we shouldn't think that his colleagues in the Nordic languages department hadn't had equivalent

insights. So, what was our accomplishment? We had actually done the study. *That* is the accomplishment.

A history of who has done what can of course be written, of whose work caused the greatest appreciation and got the most followers. However, a disciplinary history must account for the climate of the times, its embedding in society at large. I attempted a characterization of the zeitgeist of the 1960s (see Jernudd 1997). Harsh reality, solidly grounded in socio-political preferences by institutions on which academic work depends, among them foundations and government institutions, determines directions of research; and for the individual, so do their networks of peers, as they meet in conferences and read each other's papers, and, obviously, do terms of employment. All in self-reinforcing loops of causation, eventually broken by new interests.

How would you define the role of sociolinguistics in broader society? Have you observed changes in that role during your career?

Allow me to interpret this question not in relation to "changes" but in relation to "how" sociolinguistic work has had an impact, therefore can have an impact, on broader society.

The world works in mysterious ways. If I didn't believe that intellectual-academic work has an eventual impact on society – a role to play in broader society – I should have become a fighter pilot (as the Stanford test, way back, suggested).

When I arrived in Australia in 1966, looking at my new environment with sociolinguistic eyes, I encountered relative neglect of studying immigrant communities, but more acutely, a confused understanding of communication in Australian Aboriginal communities. After some back and forth with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and support from my Head of Department, Professor Hammarström, it gave me a small grant to do field work in the Northern Territories. I came to spend time mainly at Bagot settlement in Darwin. My findings were unsurprising: the indigenous inhabitants used a quite stable variety of English, as one of the varieties in their speech repertoires. I gave an account of this at Monash University and had my report published (as Jernudd 1971). That variety came later to be identified with what is now referred to as Kriol, an Australian Aboriginal language firmly established and now recognized for use in societal allocation of language functions, for example, courts, education. My work then was but one of many contributions towards the eventual recognition of Kriol. But it may have had an impact in its own mysterious way.

Decisively concrete roles for sociolinguistics in broader society are exemplified by work in the fields of bilingualism and bilingual education, concerning indigenous and immigrant groups in the US, in Europe and Latin America. Engagement with social institutions on behalf of African-American English also comes to mind.

The formulation and implementation of the International Research Project on Language Planning Processes (1968–1971) depended on close interaction with actors in national language planning agencies and equivalent institutions. I will refer only to the Indonesian part of the project. Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, author, professor of Indonesian, and secretary of the Komisi Bahasa Indonesia attended the project planning meeting. His compatriot Anton Moeliono supported Joan Rubin on the Indonesian part of the project, presented a dissertation to the Australian National University on the theory and practice of language planning and served as head of the national language agency.

I could have chosen Malaysia, Bangladesh, Israel, India, even Sweden, as examples of direct involvement, not only through the International Research Project on Language Planning Processes but by other engagements as well, in language plan-

ning, language cultivation and term development and standardization. Further, and noteworthy in this regard are the conferences and work groups that were convened during my time at the East-West Center. One, convened in Vila, Vanuatu, in August 1984 brought together officials, language activists and political appointees on languages across the Pacific. Several other conferences on Chinese at the East-West Center brought together representatives from PRC, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and of course individual experts from the United States.

Very much to the point was the editing and worldwide distribution of the *Language Planning Newsletter*, later continued by the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore as the *New Language Planning Newsletter*. (The Mysore institute is one of the three government agencies contributing to India's language policy: the institutes for English and Hindi being the other two.)

There is more, of course, to demonstrate how sociolinguistics can work hand in hand with "broader society". Today, I have the privilege of being involved with a language management network of scholars (http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/) that includes researchers who are also officers in language cultivation agencies, and which also attracts practitioners to its biannual symposia.

What would you say has been your most significant contribution to the field so far?

It is not up to me to say. But looking back, I accomplished a few things as a matter of course. When I first arrived in the Sudan, I didn't know that I would get involved with a survey of language use, with a focus on Arabic in relation to other languages in this multilingual country. When I took up my first regular position as a lecturer in linguistics at Monash University in Melbourne, a young university still in 1966, I applied common sociolinguistic sense and questioned both that there was no regional variation in Australian English – however slight – and that the indigenous Australians spoke gibberish English. Of course, in both cases, there was awareness that this couldn't really be so, and the thrust of study of indigenous languages was to "rescue" them (the 1960s was still a period of "reservations" and so on). So, I set about to correct both. My efforts were not much noticed, however, and my time in the Top End of the Northern Territory resulted in an invitation to be trained as an indigenous person, something I had to decline.

My work as a member of the International Research Project on Language Planning Processes may not have contributed quite what my elders expected but it had an impact in that it stretched the boundaries of the field of study much beyond post-colonial language policy issues (and similar situations elsewhere). Behavior toward language, after all, what people do to language, comprises much more. The

fact that the first review of our project report took place in Sweden (at Skokloster, in 1973) with participation by experts in language cultivation underscored this point. The interest basis of those behaviors and also – and perhaps this is even more significant – the integration with linguistics, matured into language management theory.

What is your assessment of the macro-micro divide that has characterized sociolinguistics since its inception?

That it is a convenience, that it is arbitrary, that it allows individual researchers to work on the one end of the divide (as long as they realize the other end exists!). People in the real world who discuss policy issues carry on a discourse at the macro level. This doesn't mean that a sociolinguist also can ignore micro issues when seeking to understand those policy people. Eddie Kuo and I built our paper on "Language management in a multilingual state: the case of planning in Singapore" on the macro-micro distinction (Kuo and Jernudd 1988). This is what we wrote: "Singaporean language management practice has allowed a gap to develop between macro-level systematic implementation of language norms and micro-level noting and evaluation of language use... The macro-sociolinguistic perspective fits an earlier period of development... [and] the micro-sociolinguistic perspective will become increasingly relevant in the future as Singapore matures" (Kuo and Jernudd 1988: 34). We conclude that the perspectives are complementary to each other.

I made some very strong statements in my paper "Language planning from a management perspective" (Jernudd 1993) without mentioning the macro-micro issue. I averred that "language planning works when language planners offer solutions to language inadequacies that language users in the general community have noted and evaluated as inadequate and in want of adjustment" (Jernudd 1993: 138). Of course, the language user can be put up to – induced to – accept solutions, too. What is important is that "students of language planning ... describe and explain who are the people with the language problems and how these problems arise in actual discourse..." (Jernudd 1993: 140).

It is not easy to capture the common man's, anybody's, thoughts, pronounced opinions and actual discourse problems. But it can be done. Looking into archives and annotating queries put to agencies that advise on language are indirect methods but recording real interactions and talking about them can't be beat for validity.

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