

**Summer Institute of Linguistics
Publications in Sociolinguistics**

Publication 2

Publications in Sociolinguistics is a serial publication of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc. The series is a venue for works covering a broad range of topics in sociolinguistics. While most volumes are authored by members of the Institute, suitable works by others will also form part of the series.

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The Early Days of Sociolinguistics

Memories and Reflections

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**A Publication of
The Summer Institute of Linguistics
1997**

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The [R]Evolution of Sociolinguistics

A Personal Retrospect of the Early 1960s

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Milestones. Disciplines and milestones construct each other. There are events that have grown in importance to become disciplinary milestones, having once been important *in a different sense*. Early events are remembered in terms of their *later* importance and, I believe, retold as chunks of a story. The story is told a little differently each time because the telling responds to the situation that prompted it, but the story firms up as time goes by. Present interests and socioacademic relations select their antecedents *ex post facto*. The disciplinary paradigm selects its canon, its classics, and textbooks—but these publications are indexical or summary statements of thought and enquiry that have multifarious social-academic histories of construction. It is difficult enough to know thyself at the moment of an event unfolding. For example, in the fall of 1962 I discussed the draft report (Jernudd and Johansson 1963) of a study of social stratification of choice of vocabulary and pronunciation in Stockholm Swedish with Claes-Christian Elert, Phonetics Lecturer at Stockholm University. He commented on a passage that probably criticized Swedish language specialists for not taking a sociolinguistic point of view. He said that I should not think that we were

the first to have *thought* to do what we did, but that we should be proud of having *done* it.

Some doings, then, can be recovered out of the past, yet their record alone does not produce history. There are good reasons for others to have thought but not to have done what we think it is important to do.

Happily, the editors offer a (cop-)out: what were milestones *for you*?¹ It was an important event *for me* that I attended Charles Ferguson's course on Sociolinguistics at the LSA Linguistic Institute at the University of Washington, Seattle, in the summer of 1963. It was also an important event for me that my term paper in that course on the language situation in Tadzhikistan was eventually published by the editors Voegelin² in *Anthropological Linguistics* (1965). It was an even more important event *for me* that I was invited to and attended the Airlie House conference on language problems of developing nations in the fall of 1966, with a paper on "Linguistic Integration and National Development: A Case Study of the Jebel Marra Area, Sudan" (1968).

The *Zeitgeist* of the early sixties. While a discipline of sociolinguistics was forming, displaying unity vis-à-vis other types of linguistics, there was considerable diversity of thought, enquiry, idiom, and social structure behind work that constructed sociolinguistics (Jernudd and Neustupný 1974). Yet, I venture some guesses about a few features of the *Zeitgeist* in the 1960s that conspired to produce one particular type of sociolinguistics practiced by the "iglpers," the international group of language planners:

- There were different worlds: The East Bloc, the U.S.A., the underdeveloped and developed worlds; the cold war caused competition that benefited language study, international study and engagement with development.
- There was interest in development.
- Some of us felt excluded by entrenched interests in government and politics, yet,
- we recognized and accepted the realities of political process and central state power;
- and we believed in the good of state action, that governments could act efficiently and satisfactorily.

¹Thus history is reduced to anecdote.

²My baby daughter [un]happily presented Carl Voegelin a bouquet of flowers on the evening of his death in Honolulu.

- There was radical change in academic paradigms, notably in the social sciences, information sciences (and technologies) and linguistics—utilitarian descriptivism and structuralism matured and were already being undermined by discourse-based critical theory, ethnomethodologies, and process-based thought and methods.
- Distances were shrinking (globalism had not yet arrived although IBM had, to Stockholm, with English as in-house language, I was told).

New nations were emerging in the cold-war decolonization period. A sociolinguistics with differential bases in the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union responded to this global restructuring (Rice 1962, Guxman 1960), the latter with an ideologically governed theory of development of national languages on the route towards an endpoint of internationalism, the former with empirical methods of fact gathering and classification of use of all languages in the new nations on the route towards modernization (with an unthought endpoint), in both cases for purposes of policy formulation and language development. Mobilization of the emerging masses and modernization of their societies were key issues and goals. There was a belief that knowledge of processes of mobilization and modernization, and description of the language situation, could be co-articulated with policy processes of decision making to inform a state (central) planning process that aimed at development; planning would implement policy and feed back information into a continuing cycle of policy and planning, of problem determination, choice of solution by decision making according to optimization theory within constraints of modelling of behavior, and implementation. The political process itself could be so planned. There was optimism and belief in orderly, even well informed, decision making involving governments. I concluded a very brief introduction to "Språksociologi" (sociolinguistics) published in the Anthropology newsletter at Stockholm University in 1964 with (pages 3–4),

I will mention one single practical application: a description of the language situation serves as factual input [Swedish: underlag] for decisions on language problems being taken by those governing the nation. I think first of the developing new nations where the need is immediate. But these issues are of course important also in other nations, e.g., concerning educational problems.

Intellectual concerns and contributing disciplines. My nearly accidental engagement with language (by military service placement to study Russian) revealed a wide open field of inquiry that allowed application and testing of methods and theories to language as universal communication

behavior and to languages as its specimens by accident and human design. The methods were those of the social sciences—and they were available and obvious. The theories were those of sociology, chorology (the study of spatial distributions), political economy and public administration, development and social change—and they were crying out for a language dimension. Sociolinguistics as a discipline emerged later to select and order interests and activities. At the time there was no question but that whatever was thought and theorized in planning theory should apply to language. Similarly, when I planned my first field work in Sudan, I based it on chorological theory (Hägerstrand 1953): to test aspects of chorological theory on and extend them to particular-language-using populations. Conclusions and recommendations in my Sudan paper refer to social, geographical and economic determinants of the spread of Arabic; I claim that “[E]fficient language planning would take account of these terminants and might even propose, as a means of promoting language knowledge and use, the subsidizing of public transport or local products” (1968:178). During the following period of emergence of types of sociolinguistics with their respective social structures and idioms, much relevant input was lost because of neglect of thought and facts from outside it. I agree with Fishman’s evaluation (1987:410) that “most sociolinguists engaged in language planning are simply too uninformed with respect to formal sociology” and that we “have benefitted far too little from the theory that has been elaborated by specialists working in other areas of social change and social planning” and feel that this evaluation can be applied also to other types of sociolinguistics.

Multidisciplinary formal training. I exchanged seminars on sociolinguistics in 1963 with Ulf Hannerz (wherefrom the brief newsletter article, 1964), he in an ethnological anthropological institution at Stockholm University and I in Phonetics.³ At that time, Linguistics did not exist as an examinable subject much less institution anywhere in Sweden. Phonetics (at Uppsala and Stockholm, in my case, but available also at Lund) offered an umbrella for linguistic study and examination. I got my decision sciences, social and behavioral sciences training at the Stockholm School of Economics working towards my MBA. I specialized in the economics of public administration: how to improve efficiency of decision making in government. As for linguistics, in 1966 I became the first student in Sweden to be examined, by special permission, in Linguistics (allmän språkvetsenskap) at Stockholm University which appointed Bertil Malmberg at Lund University

³Hannerz researched *Soulside* (1969) with an affiliation at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., and returned to pioneer social anthropology at Stockholm University (against fierce academic resistance).

as examiner. The person whose leadership accomplished this was the Professor of Latin, Dean of Arts, and then Rector of Stockholm University, Dag Norberg. He had apparently decided to modernize language study at Stockholm University, and succeeded. At Uppsala, Göran Hammarström, whose seminars I followed, fought a valiant disciplinary battle on behalf of structural linguistics but decided to leave for Australia in 1965—and I followed him there in 1966.

Individuals’ management of an emerging field. John Lotz, John Gumperz, and Charles Ferguson visited Stockholm in the very early 1960s, with different impact and purpose. Gumperz’ lecturing must have had a considerable impact on my thought;⁴ but Ferguson’s interest in sitting down with the mere undergraduate me over lunch probably decided my future path in sociolinguistics. Charles Ferguson’s management of the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Center’s newsletter *The Linguistic Reporter*, his interest in and concern for individuals, and his lucid lectures and articles shaped sociolinguistics. Through Ferguson, I met Joshua Fishman and J. V. Neustupný who was also invited to the 1966 Airlie House conference on language problems of developing nations in the same year as both of us joined Monash University in Melbourne. Joshua Fishman took me on board a life-long journey of writing and research; Jiří Neustupný became my close friend and intellectual companion.

Later I appreciated the significance of Mel Fox’ (and others’, among them Elinor Barber, Frank Sutton, Champ Ward) work at the Ford Foundation (cf. Fox 1975) and through the Social Science Research Council (U.S.A.), the Center for Applied Linguistics (under Charles Ferguson’s direction), and through a multitude of other institutions worldwide, to respond to and nurture individual interests and needs for contacts, conferencing, training, periods of writing and research, and books, in support of sociolinguistics in general and the international group of language planners in particular.

My one “critical” contribution to the shaping of the field—“revisited.” I know I should nominate my contribution to *Can Language Be Planned?* (Rubin and Jernudd, editors, 1971) because it is a book that still sells, it reports on a cooperative, deliberate effort to develop language planning theory, and it led the way for the only major international comparative project on language planning processes (Rubin, Jernudd, Das Gupta, Fishman, Ferguson 1977). Should the book be written today, it could not carry

⁴And I visited Gumperz’ home in New York in 1963, and subsequently at Berkeley; but I also made a point to speak to Morris Halle at MIT!

the subtitle "Sociolinguistic Theory and Practice for Developing Nations," but would have to take account of a broad range of different sociolinguistic situations at different levels of enlargement (from nation to firm), of a broad range of different interests and population groups (from women to refugees), under widely different communicative circumstances (of media, channels, information processing), and foremost, of the different ideological and real, global and local sociopolitical conditions. A dominant contemporary economic ideology favors deregulation (paradoxically enforced by controlling state institutions or supranational organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank), the *Zeitgeist* commands attention to individual and small group rights and problems over and above positing a collective (public) interest, the struggling communities have largely been abandoned to their own fates. What has not changed, however, is my commitment in the book to resist disciplinary closure of thought and enquiry: planning theory must answer to general planning theory, problem-solving models to general problem-solving theory, economics to general economics, political theory to political science, and developmental speculation and recommendation to theory of socioeconomic change.

Sociolinguistics teaching. I taught regularly scheduled sociolinguistics courses in the undergraduate linguistics curriculum at Monash University from 1966. In 1967 an introductory course in linguistics, which included lectures on sociolinguistics, was taken by practically all students of a language in the Faculty of Arts, including Classical languages, and of Anthropology and Sociology.

At Monash University, Michael Clyne studied bilingualism among migrants. Language planning and management were virgin fields, as was sociolinguistic description (including a geographical dimension, and the study of contact) of any social group in Australia. Australian English specialists were of course aware of Cultivated, General, and Broad Australian English varieties of speaking, but their theories were utterly unsophisticated and essentially equated person with variety (as reviewed by me in 1971). Discourse was an unknown concept. It was under the circumstances easy to generate excitement among students. My unpublished files of student work and my own research held data and findings that we generated in the sixties that were not reproduced by other scholars until well into the eighties.

Maybe a close look would uncover material that could still make news. Professor Steven Muecke, Mrs. Elizabeth Thuan, Dr. Manfred Klarberg, and Dr. Helen Tebble were among those students who shared in the excitement and remained associated with the field. My immediate colleagues *in situ* with sociolinguistics interests were Michael Clyne (German), Professor Göran

Hammarström (Linguistics), and Professor Jiří Neustupný (Japanese). Elsewhere, I had acquired a mentor and colleague in Joshua Fishman. He brought me to the East-West Center (1968–69) to develop language planning theory, and then into the international project on language planning processes. He asked me to read his introduction to *Sociolinguistics* (1970) in manuscript and to comment which I did in copious detail and with unstoppable confidence [*sic!*]. And I came to share with him in the grief of Uriel Weinreich's death.

There is no question in my mind that should one single most important publication have to be identified that helped to provide definition and visibility for the sociolinguistics field of the seventies and eighties, this would be Fishman's (1970) introduction (in its several manifestations). Weinreich's *Languages in Contact* may have held all the seeds, Ferguson's diglossia article and Labov's New York study may be the most quoted by some measure (are they?), Hymes' 1956 paper the longest-lasting fruitfully repeated grid of enquiry, and so on—but Fishman's introduction to sociolinguistics/sociology of language offered a unified perspective and a program for teaching and research.⁵

Aspiration. Efficiency in government through systems analysis (McKean 1958) was an overriding aspiration which could be projected on language planning and on other problem-solving language, e.g., in language teaching (Jernudd 1968, presented at a seminar at the Stockholm School of Economics in May 1966). Further, interest in development produced interest in language planning, thus in government decision making on matters of language development and determination. Language offered an exciting area of work because it had to be regarded as an intangible good, with peculiar properties. The need for research to establish a knowledge base that allows prediction of probable language behaviors was taken for granted; on this basis, for a given problem, peoples' preferences would have to be determined along dimensions of normally conflicting goals, alternative solutions would have to be proposed as would probabilities of outcome. Our models assumed that the validity and value of decisions had to be continuously reassessed because situations change, and they change partly because of the decisions taken and implemented.

Theoretical advance in the study of differentiation of language use in society and space was another aspiration. The two aspirations were strongly

⁵Together with his *Readings* (1968) and *Advances* (1971, 1972) volumes, the introduction to sociology of language made up Fishman's course in the sociology of language, not sociolinguistics. The *Sociolinguistics* introduction was overtaken by the sociology of language introductions.

interrelated in that good decisions require good theory. Advance could be had by applying models from chorology (the general science of spatial distributions) and the social sciences. I simply took it for granted that theories and methods from disciplines that explain and predict social and spatial distribution of human characteristics (behaviors) would apply to language as well. I am, with Fishman (1987), disappointed but not surprised that with formation of disciplinary types of sociolinguistics this openness necessarily became constrained.⁶ On what base(s) new openness could develop, I do not know but am willing to speculate: perhaps individual rights? information systems? renewed interest in public responsibility for management and restoration of habitat, not in a state (government) system but on a coalition of diverse interests?

⁶The problem of explaining the human language faculty was understood as a separate matter.