Introduction: The Best of *Language*, 1925-2016

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This three-volume work presents articles selected by the editors of *Language*, present and former, from the first ninety years of the Linguistic Society of America's flagship journal *Language*. To a considerable extent, the pages of *Language* can be viewed as a microcosm of the development of the field of linguistics from the founding of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) in 1924 to today. Our decision to divide the anthology into three volumes stems in part from the fact that it yielded three roughly equal periods to deal with. More interestingly, this division — especially between volumes 1 and 2 — reflects a dramatic change in the intellectual foci of our discipline, from a heavy emphasis on historical linguistics (mostly but not exclusively Indo-European linguistics) to a broader scope with a sharp focus on cognitive and social aspects of language. The transition between Volumes 2 and 3 is less stark.

In Volume 1, which covers 1925-1955 (*Language* volumes 1-31), we see some articles that speak to issues of importance to the beginnings of the field of linguistics in the West in the 19th century, e.g. sound change and language classification, whose importance continued into the 20th century (and indeed continues today), as well as some articles that illustrate the emerging interest in language structure. Volume 1 also bears witness to the beginnings of themes that will become prominent in the next period. In particular, the last three articles in this volume, the one by Yehoshua Bar-Hillel and the two by Zellig Harris, address foundational issues that will find much fuller expression with the advent of Noam Chomsky and his strikingly new theory of syntactic structure, generative grammar.

Volume 2 (1956-1985, vols. 32-61) begins with two articles, both of them book reviews, that became famous and helped to introduce Chomsky's ideas to the linguistics community. Although the next few decades saw an enormous amount of activity in generative grammar and a huge number of publications, especially in formal syntax, this activity is visible only to a limited extent in the pages of *Language*, and to an even more limited extent in this anthology. A major reason is that the founding of new linguistics journals, especially *Linguistic Inquiry* (1970), *Linguistics and Philosophy* (1977), and *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* (1983), reduced the impact of *Language* in generative circles by siphoning off papers that might otherwise have appeared in *Language*. A parallel increase in the status of linguistics in American universities can be seen in the explosive growth in the number of linguistics departments nationally between 1955 and 1985. Another theme that can be seen in Volume 2 is how the expanding scope of the discipline gave rise to a broad range of novel domains of inquiry. Among the new or resurgent subfields that are represented in this volume are intonation (Bolinger), sociolinguistics (Labov, Dorian, Cedergren & Sankoff), and contact linguistics (Emeneau, Pfaff).

The transition to volume 3 — which covers the period from 1986 to 2016, vols. 62-92 — displays no similar dramatic intellectual shift comparable to that between volumes 1 and 2. But we see in volume 3, among other changes, a clear sign of the emergence of research on, and concern for, endangered languages and their role in linguistics as a major

new thrust of intensive research. Indeed, one set of closely-connected articles in volume 3, Ken Hale et al. (*Language* 68:1-42, 1992), together with responses (two of which, Ladefoged 1992 and Dorian 1993, are included here), is widely credited with bringing this topic to the forefront of linguists' attention world-wide. Another notable development seen here is the emergence of strong quantitative methods in linguistics; examples are the articles by Nakhleh et al. (2005) and Chang et al. (2015), both of them applied to the domain of historical linguistics (specifically, determining language relationships). Similarly, quantitative methods are at the center of the debate about the extent to which linguistic judgments ("intuitions") form a reliable source of linguistic data. These issues find expression in two articles in this volume, Sprouse (2011) and Weskott & Faneslow (2011). The importance of cognitive science to developments in linguistics is evident in Birdsong (1992), in Gundel et al. (1993), in Jackendoff (2011), and in several others. Finally, Rickford & King (2016) focuses the results of linguistic analysis on pressing societal issues.

The selection process that has resulted in these volumes has been long and difficult. We consulted a number of sources: a list of most-cited *Language* articles provided by the LSA Secretariat; the results of a survey of members conducted by the Secretariat in an effort to determine LSA members' favorite *Language* articles; the 1957 anthology edited by Martin Joos, *Readings in linguistics: the development of descriptive linguistics in America since 1925*,[1] as a particularly well-known early compilation of key papers in our field; and the indices and issues of *Language* itself. Ultimately, however, we had to rely on our own judgment and our own assessment of the field and of the articles themselves. Most readers will probably disagree with one or more of our choices and deplore one or more omissions from the anthology; such differences of opinion are inevitable in an enterprise of this sort.

The main selection criteria we have used are quality (of course!), importance to the field of linguistics, and the likelihood, for older articles, that they can be read with profit even now and, for more recent ones, that they will be read with profit in the foreseeable future. Other less important criteria entered our deliberations occasionally.

We found that the luxury of time allowed a perspective that shrank as the papers we were assessing became more recent. While the choices were difficult all along, our discussion of volumes 1 and 2 (ending in 1985) was aided by the perspective of several decades of experience in the field. In volume 3, by contrast, and especially among papers published in the last decade or so, we felt that we were trying to predict which papers would prove of lasting value, an uncertain enterprise at best. Some of the discussion became involved to an extent we had not experienced before. We were aided by the implicit advice of the LSA's institution, in 2012, of an annual 'Best Paper in *Language*' award.[2] However, this was only one factor in making our choices, and clearly the numbers disallow the automatic inclusion of award winners in a collection of this nature. We revisit

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[1]This work was originally published by the American Council of Learned Societies (Committee on the Language Program). A later edition was published by the Univesrity of Chicago Press but with a slightly different title, *Readings in linguistics I: the development of descriptive linguistics in America, 1925-56*. The same Press published a second volume in 1966, *Readings in linguistics II*, edited by Eric Hamp, Fred W. Householder, and Robert Austerlitz, and an abridged combined edition in 1995, *Readings in linguistics I & II*, edited by Joos, Hamp, Householder, and Austerlitz.

[2]For a description of this award and a list of the winners, see https://www.linguisticsociety.org/about/who-we-are/lsa-awards#best-language.

this below. The number of articles in each of the first two volumes is nearly identical: 17 in volume 1 and 18 in volume 2. The page counts for the three volumes, however, differ rather dramatically, due primarily to the fact that starting around 1980 *Language* articles began to be significantly longer than in previous years. Volume 3 includes 20 papers, but three of them (the ones mentioned above on endangered languages) form what we regarded as a single contribution for purposes of counting, leaving Volume 3 with 18 papers by our count. The figures for all three volumes add up to a high degree of selectivity. In fact, the chances for a *Language* article to get into this anthology are considerably less than the chances for a submission to get into the journal: the acceptance rate for *Language* submissions hovers around 11%, while the 17 articles in our volume 1, for instance, represent less than 3% of the 602 articles published in the first thirty-one volumes of *Language*. We were distressed to realize, once we had our lists compiled, that some of the most prominent and most influential scholars in the field of linguistics were omitted from the anthology. One reason for significant gaps is that these scholars neglected to publish their most important writings in *Language*. Readers will therefore look in vain here for any of the much-cited works of Benjamin Lee Whorf,[3] or Charles Ferguson's 'Diglossia' (*Word*, 1959) or Edward Keenan & Bernard Comrie's 'Noun Phrase Accessibility and Universal Grammar' (*Linguistic Inquiry*, 1977), or Emmon Bach & Robert Harms's 'How do languages get crazy rules?' (in Robert P. Stockwell & Ronald S. Macaulay, eds., *Linguistic change and generative theory*, Indiana University Press, 1972). The review of Skinner (1959) is Chomsky's only major publication in *Language*, though he did have an article in vol. 31/1 (1955), 'Logical syntax and semantics: their linguistic relevance', and another in the issue dedicated to the memory of Bernard Bloch (43/1, 1967), 'Some general properties of phonological rules'.

Inspecting the tables of contents for the first two volumes reveals other somewhat surprising gaps too. The 1930s and the 1960s are represented by just one article each; the dearth of 1960s papers might possibly be explained by the old joke ("If you remember the 60s, you weren't there"), but that explanation seems unlikely to apply to the 1930s as well. In the third volume we noted that the middle decade appeared underrepresented. We attribute the gaps in each case to mere chance and do not read anything substantive into it, however tempting it may be to try to do so.

As mentioned above, now that the LSA has established an annual prize for the Best Paper in *Language*, readers might expect the winners to be automatic choices for inclusion in an anthology like this one. But a quick calculation will show that that would be impossible: the current article count is well below the number of years covered by each volume. Moreover, an article that wins Best Paper in one year may turn out in future years to have less impact than was originally expected. Thus, although we certainly expect some Best Paper winners to turn up in future *Language* anthologies of the future, and although several of them do in fact appear in volume 3, they will not be included automatically.

We have enjoyed the opportunity to engage in this exercise and hope that those reading our selections will similarly enjoy the fruits of our labors.

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[3]For instance, to mention just one, 'Language, mind and reality', written in 1941, first appeared in print in *The Theosophist* 63.1.281-91 (1942).