UW

UW LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

This year was one of transitions. We have new assistant professors Barbara Citko (PhD SUNY Stony Brook) in syntax and Fei Xia (PhD University of Pennsylvania) in computational linguistics. Ellen Kaisse was appointed Divisional Dean as her "acting" term ended. Fritz Newmeyer retired and Alicia Wassink will be promoted to Associate Professor with tenure in September.

Overall the 11 faculty (counting Fritz but not Ellen) produced two books, 16 articles in refereed journals and 35 chapters in collections. Fritz's lectures, articles and travel seemed to keep him away from Seattle most of the time. Richard Wright was keynote speaker at a conference in France and in total gave six talks at international conferences. Sharon Hargus made nine conference presentations and received a competitive grant from the UW Royalty Research Fund. Karen Zagona did three conference presentations in Europe and edited a special issue of the journal *Lingua*. Emily Bender gave invited papers in Norway, Seattle and Portugal, while Fei presented at four conferences, one as far away as Australia. Barbara published two single author articles in highly prestigious journals (*Linguistic Inquiry* and *Syntax*). I've given eight talks in five countries (also including Australia) and am awaiting the publication of my next book.

NEW GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD
by Jim Hoard, LAB Chair

In June the Linguistics Advisory Board established a Graduate Excellence in Research award in the amount of $1,000 to be given each spring beginning in 2007. The purpose is to recognize and honor a graduate student for outstanding linguistics research as evidenced by one or more refereed publications or conference presentations.

Pledges to the Linguistics Graduate Student Support Fund, launched in 2004, now total $48,206, of which $33,772 has been received. Without significantly affecting the growth of the fund, a portion of the accruing interest will be diverted to the new Graduate Excellence in Research award.

While establishing an endowed graduate linguistics fellowship remains our long-term goal, the award makes a positive, visible contribution to the graduate linguistics program much earlier than would otherwise be possible.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all the people who have contributed to the Linguistics Graduate Student Support Fund and to urge those who have not yet contributed to do so.

COMPLING NEWS

Exciting things are happening in the field of computational linguistics and we're happy to note some of the ways in which Department faculty and students are involved. In its first year of existence the Professional MA program successfully placed students in internships at Microsoft, Google, PARC, AOL/Tegic, Natural Interaction Systems and other sites. Of the 26 students in the program, 12 attended full time and are just completing their degrees.

Emily Bender has been appointed adjunct faculty in Computer Science and Engineering. She's also on the advisory board of that department's Turing Center.

The Center is a multidisciplinary research center investigating problems at the crossroads of natural language processing, machine learning, Web search and the Semantic Web. Its mission is to advance the philosophy, science and technology of pan-lingual communication and collaboration among human and artificial agents.

Emily is very involved in the Center's research, spearheading the building of a "grammar matrix" that encodes the rules of many languages to facilitate machine translation.

She recently illustrated the complexity of that enterprise for readers of *Puget Sound Business Journal (Seattle)*: "A simple sentence like 'Have that report on my desk by Friday' can have 32 different meanings in English alone, depending on the context in which it was spoken. We have lots of expectations of what people are talking about which guide us to the right interpretation. Machines are really bad at that."

But, we add, they're getting better!

[For more on the Turing Center go to http://turing.cs.washington.edu.]

A proposal by graduate student Bill McNeill has won $66,710 from the UW Student Tech Fee Committee for purchase of a 20-node parallel computing cluster for the Department's computational linguistics lab, which is used by undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and postdocs from several departments.

Bill's proposal notes that computational linguistics is a rapidly growing field whose fruits of research are enjoyed by anyone who runs an email spam filter, uses Google to translate a web page from one language to another or makes a credit card payment over the phone without ever talking to a human operator.

However, state of the art computational linguistics applications consume voluminous amounts of data and processor time, which up to now has necessitated that the Department ration the amount of computing power allocated to any given problem. Students bore the brunt of that rationing when doing research for their degrees, conference papers or publications.

Integration of the new 20-node cluster into the lab will remove the processing power bottleneck, and for those wishing to work off-site, remote login will be possible from anywhere in the world that an Internet connection can be made.

In June Emily Bender and graduate students Laurie Poulson, Steve Moran and David Goss-Grubbs participated in the second annual DELPH-IN summit in Norway. That's a healthy increase in student involvement since Scott Drellishak attended the 2005 Lisbon summit.

DELPH-IN, or Deep Linguistic Processing with HPSG, is a collaborative effort by computational linguists at a dozen research sites in Europe, Asia and the US (just UW and Stanford at present).

In their research, which combines linguistic and statistical processing methods for getting at the meaning of texts and utterances, the group has adopted two models of linguistic analysis, Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar and Minimal Recursion Semantics. They have also committed to a shared format for grammatical representation and to a rigid scheme of evaluation.

The five-day Norway summit was a working meeting that brought together developers and active users of DELPH-IN resources for in-depth technical discussions and plenary sessions ranging from site and project updates to strategic and tactical discussion of future activities.

[Go to http://www.delph-in.net for more on DELPH-IN, whose logo is—what else?—a dolphin.]

UW Professional Master's in Computational Linguistics

http://www.compling.washington.edu

STUDENT NEWS

GRADUATE DEGREES EARNED

Since the December 2005 newsletter the following students have earned the degrees indicated, with dissertation or thesis title.

PhD
Kumiko Kato, Japanese gapping in

Minimalist syntax

PhC
Anya Dormer
Jeffrey Stevenson

MA
Benjamin Barrett (title not available)

David Goss-Grubbs, An approach to tense and aspect in Minimal Recursion Semantics

Laurie Poulson, Evaluating a cross-linguistic grammar model: Methodology and test-suite resource development

FACULTY FOCUS

In issue 3:1 Michael Brame inaugurated this occasional feature in which faculty submit brief career-spanning autobiographical sketches. Fritz Newmeyer likewise accepted our recent invitation but turned the tables by suggesting a change in format. The following conversation took place in his office.

Let's start with some background. Where did you grow up and go to school?

I was born in Philadelphia, not far from where Chomsky was born. I didn't live there very long though—Philadelphia wasn't big enough for both of us. When I was two years old my family moved to a suburb of New York on Long Island. Port Washington was a very nice town on the north shore, which is East Egg country in *The Great Gatsby*. It's also the hometown of John Philip Sousa, America's greatest composer.

Ah, were you a young trombonist?

No, certainly by Port Washington standards I had no talent whatsoever, but the social highlight of the year was the Sousa band concert and his presence was everywhere, in the schools, you name it. Sousa, along with the sailing and everything else, made Port Washington a great place for a kid to grow up.

I was an undergraduate at Rochester. I started out in chemistry but ended up with a BA in geology. Don't ask me why. I think it was people laughing when I told them I was a geology major that just deter-

mined that I was going to stick it out. I certainly wasn't enjoying it. I mean, anybody knows how outdoorsy I am, in terms of climbing rocks and doing the things that field geologists do.

Well, lots of undergraduates don't know where they'll end up.

I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and in the 60s it was a lot easier to change fields (not that it's impossible today), so I applied to

law school and got in but really didn't want to do that, and then in my senior year my roommate was Larry Horn. He was a French linguistics major and told me about a great course, which in retrospect was not very great, but it got me interested in linguistics. So I applied to the Rochester linguistics program in May of my senior year, after I'd been accepted into law school, and they accepted me with my geology degree. My grades weren't even that great, something like 3.2 or 3.4—I've never been good at exam-taking.

I was at Rochester for a year and then I went to the 1966 Linguistic Institute at UCLA. That was the only Linguistic Institute that Chomsky has ever taught at, I think, and I heard him. Stockwell was chair of linguistics at UCLA and I said to myself, "I have to get out of Rochester." I figured with my background it was silly to apply to MIT (my grades, my geology degree), so I applied to UCLA and to Illinois, where Robert B. Lees was. Stockwell's response was lukewarm but Lees wrote back, probably the next day, and said, "Come right away and we'll give

FACULTY NEWS

Alicia Wassink has been promoted to associate professor and appointed to the National Science Foundation Advisory Panel for Linguistics. She also published in *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* (A geometric representa-

tion of spectral and temporal vowel features: Quantification of vowel overlap in three linguistic varieties) and joined Department colleagues Ellen Kaisse, Bill McNeill and Michael Scanlon in performing music at her tenure party.

Following **Fritz Newmeyer's** election as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he was recognized at the association's annual meeting in February for his contributions to linguistics and language science.

FOCUS, from p. 3

you a full fellowship." I'd pressed all the right buttons, saying I was in a behaviorist-oriented department and I wanted to escape, and Lees just thought that was great.

So you went out to Urbana.

I got my PhD in four years from the time I entered the program at Rochester. Four-year PhDs weren't that unusual, though they're very unusual now, and then there were even three-year PhDs. But what made my degree unusual was that I was at three different universities in those four years, a year-and-a-half at Rochester and then I got out, a year-and-a-half at Illinois and then my last year at MIT. My degree was officially from Illinois but MIT was where I hung out that last year.

And what did you think of MIT?

I never had anything but awe for Chomsky, but there was almost a feeling in the late 60s that he was a has-been, that he had these ideas from the early 60s but people like Lakoff and Ross and Postal and McCawley were the future, and I was swept up in that. It certainly was what I was doing that first couple of years after I got to the University of Washington. I was hired in 1969 at $10,000.

And the view of Mount Rainier.

And the view of Mount Rainier, correct. Even back then $10,000 was pretty low pay, but this is the only real job I've ever had in my life. I've had visiting appointments or part-time and things like that, but this is

the only actual job I've ever had.

Let me return to something that you just began to touch on. The linguistic wars, the role of personality, that whole complex of issues, how does that affect the trajectory of science, or specifically linguistics?

Well, I'm not equipped to answer questions about science in general except in a kind of novice way, but I think the smaller the field is and the more emerging the science is, probably the more personalities do play a role. If we look at the community of generative grammarians in 1970, personality played an incredibly large role. Chomsky and his students, the kind of young-Turk generative semanticists who would use the kind of rhetoric that was popular on campuses in the United States, a kind of revolutionary feeling, that sort of thing is happening less and less but personality never ceased to play a certain role in linguistics. With Chomsky, it's not just the brilliance but also the magnetism that he'd use. There are very few sciences, I think, where one person is as dominant in that science as Chomsky is in linguistics. Now you could say, "Look at all the people who hate Chomsky," but they're obsessed with him just as much as his supporters are. If you have some theory of grammar that's totally anti-Chomskyan, totally different, you still have to spend half your book showing how Chomsky is wrong. So in that sense Chomsky dominates everything, in syntax for sure, and you could argue that's not very healthy.

Personality can influence the course of science and later generations might conclude that in some cases it took some unfortunate meanders. Well, we'll find out. The fact that I'm not overwhelmed by a lot of the work in the minimalist program obviously affects my feeling about how history is going to judge Chomsky. I don't think that there is much question, though, that what Chomsky might be most remembered for are, for example, his review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*, which basically overturned behaviorism and led to cognitive science—in many ways different from what Chomsky would have liked to see—and the kinds of arguments he put forward—his affix-hopping analysis in *Syntactic Structures*—for mental representations of grammar. I don't think people are going to remember specific subparts of government and binding theory or the minimalist program. But that's normal. That's the way we remember ideas that are revolutionary in science.

Not to take anything away from Chomsky, but there were some fortuitous circumstances along the way, like being invited to that 1958 conference in Texas.

He had a lot of breaks, if you want to call it that, at the beginning of his career, though he denies it and likes to portray himself as oppressed from the beginning. He had a lot of contemporary support from the leading figures of structuralist

LETTER, *from p. 1*

We also furthered research by hosting the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics in April (organized by Barbara, Fritz, Richard and graduate student Don Baumer) as well as visiting lecturers throughout the year. We co-sponsored with CSE and Communication two Walker-Ames lecturers, Dr. Carol Padden, a specialist in American Sign Language from the University of California, San Diego, and Dr. Tamar Katriel of the University of Haifa who specializes in the cultural study of language. Dr. Mohamed Benrabah, Professor of English Linguistics and Sociolinguistics, Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3, gave a series of three lectures in April on language policy in Algeria.

We are pleased and proud that the Howard and Frances Nostrand Professorship and also the graduate fellowship endowment initiated by the Linguistics Advisory Board have grown substantially, that two auxiliary graduate endowments (by Phelps and Herschensohn) supplement the fellowship and that the board was able to initiate a Graduate Excellence in Research award (see p. 1). We are very grateful for the financial support of alumni and other friends of Linguistics. To contribute, use the postage paid envelope in this newsletter, make a secure online donation at http://depts.washington.edu/lingweb/info/support.html or write to phoneme@u.washington.edu.

The end-of-year highlight was Fritz's retirement celebration, from lectures in his honor by alumni Tatsu Suzuki (Nanzan University, Japan) and Pascual Masullo (University of Pittsburgh) to a party hosted at my home on Queen Anne with more than 80 guests participating. See photos at the end of the newsletter.

Julia Herschensohn

FOCUS, *from p. 4*

linguistics—it didn't last—but it was known when Chomsky was a graduate student that he was the most brilliant young person in linguistics and he would do something important. I think, in general, that it's not the case that revolutionaries are oppressed from the very beginning and stay oppressed their entire lives.

It makes a good story.

Yes, it makes a good story, and there have been cases like that, but Newton, Einstein, Darwin, that certainly wasn't their story. And that's good because it's a very pessimistic view of human nature to think that everybody with a new idea is going to be trampled by the establishment.

Of course there are degrees.

Sure, and people have certainly had their problems. Look at Galileo, who was under house arrest for the last part of his life, but he was powerful enough that the church couldn't kill him as it did Bruno, for example.

So, anyway, somebody has to write the definitive biography of Chomsky and it's certainly not going to be me. I don't have the talent for that and I don't know what I would say in terms of an overall assessment. Carlos Otero is somebody you could imagine writing a not very critical but at the same time scholarly, very interesting biography. I've never talked with him about whether he would do that or not. If there's going to be a biography I don't know who would do it, who in linguistics.

Certainly for the general public the political side is more approachable than the linguistic.

And Chomsky has always kept the two spheres of his life fairly separate, which would make it extremely difficult for anybody to write a competent biography of his life. That's why I thought of Carlos Otero, who could write about both the political and the linguistic stuff.

Returning to your career at the University of Washington, what would you identify as the high point?

Well, I've seen the Department grow very positively. We may have had one or two setbacks, but by and large it's been steady progress. How many faculty lines were there when I came? Something like three, four—I know Heles Contreras was mostly in Romance when I came.

The merger of Romance Linguistics faculty into the Department was certainly a good thing.

Yes, that was in 1995 or something like that, and it has been great for the Department. And recently we were able to hire two syntacticians and three people in computational linguistics. One thing that gives me tremendous personal satisfaction is that every faculty member in the Department, with one exception, either entered the Department when I was chair or was promoted when I was chair. Now I don't want to exaggerate my role, because lots of people have done lots of things, but a lot of the good things happened when I was chair.

In this context—good things happening—Talmy Givón once told me that he thought of you as "The Enforcer," given what he saw as your dogmatic and vigorous defense of anything Chomskyan.

I don't think that anybody would call me that anymore. I don't think that it ever applied, but it certainly wouldn't apply to me now. If you look at some of the things that I've written on formalism and functionalism in the last ten years, I've probably had more interaction with functional linguists than with formal linguists. It's funny, I suppose it's because linguistic theory in America seemed so orthodox, but I don't think most functionalists have that view of me now.

Oh, there are real, solid issues that we're all divided about. There are

FOCUS, from p. 5

functionalists who say there's no mental representation of grammar at all, that it's all probabilistic and so on, and I just think that's wrong. There are formal linguists who say that functional factors have never influenced the grammar at all, and I think they're wrong. So I don't believe "let's hold hands and everybody's right." I think that some positions are absolutely dead wrong. But there are nuances and sometimes it's not clear who's right and who's wrong. The issues aren't formulated clearly enough. But I think there's more hope for reconciliation in some ways than there has been in a long time. My feeling is that we know more and more about language without having better and better theories. I think some people would say that's almost a contradiction in terms, but there's more interesting empirical results, empirical generalizations, but it will take the next Chomsky, whoever that may be, to put them all together in some kind of really coherent theory.

So I don't have a pessimistic view, because I think we know a whole lot more about some of these things, like the effects of parsing pressure on grammatical structure, we know more about how form and meaning interact, not a lot about that, but we know a lot more about phonology and phonetics than we ever did. We know all these things, there are very good

generalizations, but I just don't see the kind of unified theory that would tie all these things together. So I'm not pessimistic about the future of the field but at the same time I'm frustrated because it seems that the empirical has outpaced theoretical developments. There was big hope about the government and binding theory, and I was certainly enthusiastic, but a lot of the biggest claims just haven't worked out. It was a great vision but I think most people would say that once you start looking at more and more languages, you realize that if a language is pro-drop it doesn't necessarily mean that there's free subject inversion and violations of the *that*-trace filter and all these things. It doesn't work out that way.

Of course the relationship between data and theory is dynamic. There are lots of examples—let's go way back to Robin Lakoff's account of *well* **and** *uh*, **for example, and the argument that a lot of other "new" data required theory to move away from Chomsky's then-current approach.**

Well, ideally, no data should be excluded a priori. We don't know in advance when constructing theories what's relevant data and what's not. Hesitation phenomena may very well be relevant for a theory of language processesing. Whether they're relevant for the grammar I'm a little more skeptical about. But

nobody I hope would say, "Well, that's just not relevant data for a theory of language." That's an unscientific thing to say. Of course all data should be on the table, but the fact that you slur your speech when you're drunk probably isn't relevant for any theory of anaphor binding. I don't want to say that it's logically impossible, but not all facts bear equally on all theories.

Agreed. Now back to the roughly chronological structure of our conversation, let's end with retirement.

Well, first of all, academics is the only profession where people say, "I'm really looking forward to retirement so I'll have more time to work." You know I enjoy teaching—I can't say I actually enjoy going to meetings and doing administration that much, it's just part of the job—but basically, I will have more time for writing, going to conferences and so on. On the personal level, as I think a lot of the people in the Department know but not everybody, there's a pretty good chance that Marilyn and I will be moving to Vancouver BC. Assuming it happens, and it could happen in the next couple of months, we'll put our Seattle house up for sale. It's a short move—we'll still be living close to Seattle and seeing people here—but a psychologically long one. We're really looking forward to it. So stay tuned...maybe by the time this appears in the newsletter we'll have some good news.

BONS VOYAGES, FRITZ

Thanks to Toshi for letting us reproduce some of his photos. You'll find more of them, plus movies, at the site he set up:
http://depts.washington.edu/lingweb/fritzparty/

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