

## Remembering Dell

Editor's note: The following reminiscences were written by scholars whose work was published in *Language in Society* during the journal's early years. All had their work edited by Dell Hymes; some were his students.

Barbara Johnstone

Dell Hymes developed his theories on communicative competence during the years in Berkeley when we had regular student-faculty interdisciplinary gatherings at John Gumperz' house. He must have liked editing, since by 1971 he had published four compilations of new papers, often arising from conferences. I had encountered him as editor in two. One was a study of bilingual language choices in the *Ethnography of communication*, a special publication of the *American Anthropologist* in 1964, later reprinted in *Directions in sociolinguistics*. The other was a paper on Navaho person metaphors for his 1967 book, *Studies in Southwestern ethnolinguistics*. As an editor, Dell was known for his vast knowledge of existing publications. We used to say, "You don't need a card catalog, just ask Dell." Besides editing for felicitous style, he always proposed references to prior relevant work he knew about.

For years, Dell was on the Social Science Research Council's Sociolinguistics Committee, and for a while he chaired it. The committee's goal was to define and launch an interdisciplinary field. Starting in 1968, we began discussing the need for journals in addition to the thematic conferences that we sponsored regularly. Dell founded *Language in Society* in 1971 (the first volume appeared in 1972), and it was followed later by Joshua Fishman's *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*.

After book reviews, my first major paper in *Language in Society* was a long one on the forms used in interpersonal control such as commands and requests, showing how all the interpersonal factors Hymes had talked about played a systematic role. He edited my manuscript a good deal and changed the title to limit its claims. His own sense of the scope of the field of course informed the journal's contents as long as he was editor.

Susan Ervin-Tripp, University of California, Berkeley

What I remember most about Dell was his encouragement to me as an individual and as a young scholar. The latter I consider less noteworthy than the former. During the years when *Language in Society* was beginning its long and successful journey as the premier journal of sociolinguistics, there were few sociologists who identified fully with sociolinguistics. Several intermittently dipped a toe into it, but

few remained completely attached to it. It was an interesting sideline for them, but not much more. I don't know exactly how Dell recognized that sociolinguistics was the one and only field for me, but he did, and he encouraged me in various ways (via personal chats during our joint attendance at bi-annual meetings of the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Sociolinguistics and, more often, by reading my publications in other journals and letting me know what he liked about what I had written). He often seemed to be a little uncomfortable or reticent with me, as if he were afraid of upsetting me, but he actually was encouraging me in his own fashion.

This was certainly true of my paper on "Similarities between language planning and other types of national planning," which I submitted to him from Jerusalem (where I was spending the years 1970–1973 on a Ford Foundation-sponsored international project on language planning). I submitted the paper with considerable trepidation, not only because I couldn't obtain the services of a secretary who could type it attractively and according to the journal's style, but also because it was clearly macro-sociolinguistic and I realized that this was not the approach that Dell himself usually preferred. Lo and behold, he accepted it, made any number of helpful editorial suggestions about it, and ended up by sympathizing with my probable frustrations at trying to get manuscripts suitably typed up while working in a developing country where neither English secretaries nor customary office supplies were easily available! As near as I can remember, none of my other American or European correspondents during the same period ever acknowledged any such difficulties, and this showed me that Dell was really trying to encourage me to keep publishing, even under difficult circumstances.

Dell also liked my paper on bridging the micro-macro gap within sociolinguistics. He cited it several times and reprinted it in one of his books of readings. His reactions to it reminded me of his telling me, on an earlier occasion, that finding and defining proper units of measurement would be the crucial methodological issue in determining the future of sociolinguistics. I have often thought back on this admonition as I came to recognize that the gap between micro- and macro- had not been effectively closed after all.

Finally, I must say at least a few words about Dell's interest in and knowledge of traditional Jewish texts. He once told me (on the occasion of one of my oral references to one such text) that many of his students were interested in (re-)examining their Jewish roots precisely because of the cultural rather than because of the spiritual aspects that were so prominent in Judaism. This is just another reason, one among many, that I will dearly miss Dell and will always treasure my memories of him.

Joshua A. Fishman, Yeshiva University

I got to know Dell Hymes when he was an assistant professor at Harvard during the years when I was a graduate student. He taught a course on field methods

that I took, so we were on friendly terms from that time on. After he became editor of *Language in Society*, my co-authors and I published several papers with him. The earliest was a study with Sandra Weintraub of the acquisition of formulaic language, particularly the American Halloween routine, which came out in 1976. This paper is known widely as “Trick or treat,” although now that I have looked it up I find its title is actually “The acquisition of routines in child language.” The last article we published under Dell’s editorship was in 1991, and this was a paper that Zita Réger and I wrote about the language of Hungarian Gypsy children. Dell was the fastest acting editor I have ever known, and he basically relied on his own judgment, at least so far as our papers were concerned. Here is what he wrote me about the Halloween paper: “Dear Jean, Thanks very much for your paper, which came today. I’ve enjoyed it very much, and would like to publish it.” He then notes which issue it will appear in, and follows this with a page and a half of very badly typed, but remarkably intelligent and incisive comments. His letters to us as authors are informative and considerate. They are also scholarly and wide ranging, a part of the intellectual history of our field during those years.

Jean Berko Gleason, Boston University

Through our collaborative publications, Dell Hymes and I will always be together in the literature. I will remember him as a valued colleague and generous collaborator. Working on the two edited volumes we co-authored, we discussed, drafted and re-worked each other’s prose. Dell never minded sharing his ideas, accepting changes to his writing, or providing valuable comment from his own encyclopedic knowledge of linguistics matters and contributing to others’ work.

When Dell took up his appointment at Berkeley in Anthropology, our collaboration began almost as soon as he settled in through informal meetings in our homes, small family houses clustered on the Berkeley hillside.

I always admired Dell’s ability to sit at the kitchen table in his Berkeley home and write. While I needed the quiet of my own study to produce coherent prose, Dell seemed able to create thoughtful, theoretically sophisticated essays typing at the table with general family activity going on around him, without losing his intellectual concentration.

In our discussions, in seminars at Berkeley and often in each other’s homes, we worked on a broader conception of language that included both linguistic analysis and ethnographically based studies of speaking practices. Our ideas led to a session of the Kroeber Anthropological Society annual meeting in 1962 where the title “The ethnography of speaking” was first used. The papers in this session were the first take on what a little later became *The ethnography of communication*, a special monograph of the *American Anthropologist*. Later still we went further in editing and revising this collection. This appeared, with some extended editorial commentary, as *Directions in sociolinguistics*, published in 1972—the year Dell

began this journal, which has become the proving ground for so much original sociolinguistic work.

John J. Gumperz, University of California, Berkeley

It was Dell Hymes' presence at the University of Pennsylvania that led me there for graduate study. Dell's 1964 edited volume, *Language in culture and society*, had impressed me as framing an exciting new approach to topics I was interested in. My hopes were entirely realized. The graduate program Dell organized, and the faculty and students he drew, were—and remain—a model of effectiveness, not just providing students with crucial background, but including them as participants in an important research enterprise. We students knew we were working at the cutting edge, encouraged to contribute to an emerging new vision of the subdiscipline. There's an excitement to that feeling that influences a student deeply. And we knew our contributions mattered. In print and in person, Dell acknowledged our efforts and promoted our careers.

Dell's lecture style was challenging for the beginning student. You couldn't just sit back and let the performance wash over you. In my second semester, I recall discovering the strategies necessary to understand him: sit in front to be able to hear him and catch his many *sotto voce* asides, and do all the week's reading in advance of the class. Suddenly, then, the field opened up for me. Dell's lectures did not present material; instead they forged ahead of it.

That forward-thinking includes, of course, founding *Language in Society*, and I see it too in Dell's correspondence with me, on journal matters and other things. A comment from a 1973 letter remains interesting. "Linguistic anthropology," he wrote, must "come to terms with social life as a whole ... I think we will have two battles to fight in the next few years—linguists who will unconsciously think, context is fine but not THAT much context, I don't have training to cope with it, we must draw the line; and sociologists or others who want to preserve the illusion of penetrating cognitive reality with limited means ... without the patience for the months and years that adequate ethnographic basis to understanding requires. So ethnography may well be the last straw, but the camel will have to be hit on the back with it for quite a while." The compass of *Language in Society* has always extended beyond linguistic anthropology and its particular concerns. But the letter was written to me—in support of my ethnographic work—and anthropology was our shared field. Characteristically, Dell was joining his support for a young scholar with his vision of an interdisciplinary synthesis. This is how I like best to remember him.

Judith Irvine, University of Michigan

My first encounter with the work of Dell Hymes was in 1967 when I taught a course in language and culture with an anthropologist, George Park. We chose Dell's

monumental collection of articles *Language in culture and society*, and I was overawed by the breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding that he displayed in the introductions to the sections and articles. Years later, teaching the language and culture course with a different anthropologist (Don Brenneis), we made regular use of Dell's SPEAKING model to illustrate the complexity of speech events. It is unfortunate that there has been little interest among quantitative sociolinguists in the kinds of factors Dell describes in his model; more attention to what Dell was saying might have helped to validate claims made in that area. As editor of *Language in Society*, Dell showed the same breadth of interests as in his earlier compilation of articles. I always found his comments on work I submitted to *Language in Society* to be perceptive and helpful, particularly when he was declining to publish it. His later work on narratives stimulated me to examine more closely those narratives I had collected in my fieldwork. My face-to-face contacts with Dell were few, because we lived on opposite sides of the country and seldom attended the same conferences, but I remember with pleasure those few occasions when we did meet. The study of language in its great variety would have been much poorer without the contribution of Dell Hymes.

Ronald Macaulay, Pitzer College

For younger readers of *Language in Society* it may be hard to imagine the almost overnight pre-eminence of the journal as the flagship of rigorous interdisciplinary scholarship on the inherently cultural and social nature of language use. Drawing contributions from an even broader range of disciplines than the *American Anthropologist* special 1964 issue on "The ethnography of communication" (also edited by Hymes, with John Gumperz), it stepped out past the more modestly printed *Anthropological Linguistics*, and offered a premier stronghold, as it were, against the growing acceptance of Noam Chomsky's more narrowly defined scope for linguistics and the swell of language research his theories inspired.

In 1976, as a brand new Ph.D., it was thrilling to see "On questions following questions in service encounters" appear in the same issue with Erving Goffman's "Replies and responses." As a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, and a student of Dell Hymes, I had been aware of the journal since its inception (following Hymes' sabbatical year in the UK), and dreamed of placing an article.

Though Dell had never solicited a submission, I dared to informally query Erving Goffman, who was then co-editor of the journal (along with William Labov), and with whom I was working more closely on my research. Erving advised me not to talk to Dell, but rather to write a formal letter requesting editorial consideration. Hymes replied quickly with copious notes and the suggestion that a different aspect of the research might be more promising. After a completely new follow-up submission, Dell again replied quickly, this time with the daunting suggestion that I combine the two submissions. Somewhat discouraged, I again consulted Goffman, who advised pursuing Hymes' suggestion and sending my "best

effort.” Somehow this simple instruction gave me the editorial focus to reorganize and combine the two submissions into one. After the final typing I was dismayed at the paper’s length, but sent it on.

Some time later there was a reply, enclosing a long letter from the reviewer, Charles Fillmore; it was a quite favorable review but included a list of seventeen points Fillmore felt should be addressed before publication. After informal assurance from Goffman that this likely meant that satisfying these points could lead to acceptance of the paper, I quickly sent in my revisions, with an accompanying list of the seventeen points and how they were addressed.

To my amazed delight, Hymes sent a letter of acceptance almost immediately, thanking me for the manner in which I had responded to the reviewer’s points. In response to having thanked him as well as Goffman and Fillmore in the published paper, Hymes later wrote to thank *me*, noting that he had sometimes had to rewrite large sections of a submission without receiving even an acknowledgment. Though I had penned every sentence myself, I knew that the quality of the published paper owed a lot to the professionalism and editorial guidance of Dell Hymes and his co-editor Erving Goffman.

Marilyn Merritt, George Washington University

My generation of sociolinguists (born in the late 1920s and early 1930s) never did have an academic course on our topic. With a few exceptions in the form of a summer institute course or the like, we were all autodidacts. But we had help. Submitting an article to *Language in Society* when Dell Hymes was editor became a tutorial in sociolinguistics. I submitted “Pronouns of address in Swedish” in early 1975, and what followed was a year’s worth of correspondence. (Remember, we didn’t have email, so correspondence meant typed letters and carbon copies on onionskin for filing. Just mechanically, it was very time-consuming.) Thinking back, it seems to me that Dell had endless patience. His more than justified criticism was usually accompanied by expressions of self-doubt about his own grasp of the issues; there was never a hint that I had overlooked crucial facts that had to be spelled out. He also asked many, many questions, the answering of which led to further analysis. In the end I had reached an understanding of and a passion for address systems that have remained my entire life. Never have I had an editor the equal of Dell Hymes; he was supportive, generous, and sharp but also gently demanding, with very high standards.

He also did not pontificate. Once, in 1979, my sociolinguistics class got into great confusion discussing the components of speaker, or sender, and *addressor* laid out in Hymes’ article “Models of the interaction of language and social life.” We were using a church service as setting and scene. I wrote to Dell for clarification. This is what he answered, after an apology for the Eagles’ football win over Pittsburgh: “I am sorry to differ, especially in religion, but I would have thought of God as the addressor and the priest as the speaker. But it could

perhaps be either way by cultural definition. You are no doubt thinking of God speaking through the man. I think I meant speaker as ‘voice’ and ‘addressor’ as ‘source of the message’ (not necessarily the instrument of delivery). Maybe there is an English ambiguity here. Maybe ‘spokesman’ helps make ‘speaker’ intermediary for me. I was making ‘speaker’ like scribe. But it has other resonances.”

The humanity and the humility of the great scholar are truly impressive.

Christina Bratt Paulston, University of Pittsburgh

Sociolinguistics has recently lost two of its finest scholars and activists, Bill Bright and Dell Hymes. One is tempted to note their fascinating relationship. They were close in age and were the products of quite similar intellectual milieus. They were both “western men,” tall, and lovers of the outdoors. Both were greatly influenced by their study of West Coast indigenous languages, cultures, and literatures (Bright: Karok; Hymes: Chinook). They shared a love of poetry, which they both studied and wrote. They enjoyed editing and were very good and prolific at it. Both served as editors of *Language in Society*. They were both professionally active: both served as presidents of the Linguistic Society of America. And of course, they were friends. The fields of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics would be very different if they had not contributed so greatly to their development.

I met Dell at the University of Pennsylvania where he came in the fall of 1965. I had begun my graduate studies in the linguistics program one semester earlier. Dell was a member of both graduate programs, linguistics and anthropology. I was one of Dell’s first students at Penn. He mentored a remarkable group of students, who have become eminent anthropologists, linguists, folklorists, and specialists in education. The first course I took from Dell was his general survey of language, culture, and society. This course was very well attended, with students from many departments, in particular anthropology, linguistics, and folklore. We all realized the relevance of this course to our own particular interests and careers. Dell was a specialist in communicative competence, but not a great oral communicator. The students in this class recognized this and came early to class, hoping to get a seat up as close as possible to Dell and thus be able to hear his remarkable, insightful, and humorous comments.

I did not go to Penn to study with Dell. I did not even know he was going to be there. As it turns out, I personally benefited immensely as he (and I) moved from topic to topic—the linguistic classification of the indigenous languages of the Americas, the areal/typological study of languages, the ethnography of speaking and communication, and ethnopoetics. I also had a special relationship with Dell in his role as editor, which included in particular critical remarks and suggestions on my work as well as that of others. People who knew Dell were always struck that he was a remarkable correspondent, taking the time to craft elaborate letters commenting in great detail on one’s work. This is what made him a great editor.

Dell was extremely supportive of the field of sociolinguistics and the individuals involved in its development. This is clear from his work as editor of *Language in Society*. Dell invited me to be a member of the journal's editorial board. He was an active member of the Social Science Research Council's committee on sociolinguistics. He helped me and Richard Bauman launch the (*Texas*) *Working Papers in Sociolinguistics*, and contributed to them.

As an editor Dell would not only make comments on one's drafts and edit them, he sometimes rewrote them entirely. This could be frustrating, but always in the end rewarding. When I began work on Kuna stories that I had recorded, Dell completely rewrote my transcriptions and translations, restructuring them into lines, verses, and stanzas, following the general pattern he had developed for the stories told in the indigenous languages of the Northwest Coast. My approach was somewhat different from Dell's, but I benefited immensely from his work on my materials.

No doubt Dell's most important personal contribution was his insistence on the close connections between and among linguistic structure, poetic structure, and sociocultural patterning. In addition to his own writing, he was able to do this as editor, receiving many works of others, either solicited by him or submitted to him. He possessed an incredible depth of knowledge, which he shared with students and contributors to what he edited. And he always imparted his concern with the social relevance and impact of language and the study of language.

Joel Sherzer, University of Texas

My first interaction with Dell Hymes occurred in 1966 when I was a doctoral student with Wally Lambert at McGill. Wally had agreed to participate in an American Sociological Association session that Dell had organized, but he had a conflict and sent me instead. I presented a paper based upon "matched-guise" work that we had been doing in Montreal, and I remember vividly how supportive Dell was talking with me before the presentation to help me (re)organize material, and then in asking questions following the presentation that helped me to make points that had been lost.

I joined the faculty at McGill in 1969 and was influenced by Bob Rosenthal's work on "expectancy effects." Wally and I developed a "matched guise" procedure that mixed and matched speech samples with actual work samples from elementary school youngsters and elicited reactions from teaching interns. The results were clear—the way a youngster presented herself through her speech far outweighed the quality of the product she submitted—and influenced the evaluation by a prospective teacher.

Wally, Dell, and I were in relatively regular communication. Dell, in his sensitive way, indicated he would be editing a new journal and asked if we would submit a paper. We, of course, replied positively, and the article by Seligman, Tucker, and Lambert appeared (*The effects of speech style and other attributes on teachers' attitudes toward pupils. Language in Society* 1:131–42, 1972).

I had the good fortune over the years to interact with Dell in various capacities, in my “academic” roles and as President of the Center for Applied Linguistics. Dell was a true scholar, a mentor, and a wonderful human being.

Dick Tucker, Carnegie Mellon University

In 1974 I submitted a paper to *Language in Society* based on my dissertation data on Native Hawaiian children’s talk-story narrations, on the recommendation of John Gumperz, from whom I learned to do discourse analysis. Dell liked the article, but wanted changes. During the revision process, Dell took the time to write detailed letters explaining the changes he wanted. He was very supportive and kind, a genuine mentor, and our letters went beyond editing to deep discussions of sociolinguistics. The resulting article was essential to my career, and its quality bears the stamp of Dell’s mentoring, as well as that of John Gumperz and Susan Ervin-Tripp.

Many years later in 1995, when I was under threat of being fired from my tenured full professor position at UC Davis because I was disabled, Dell joined dozens of other scholars worldwide who wrote letters to the Chancellor supporting me. Dell and I had not been in contact for more than a decade, but he sent me a copy of his letter. It was long, and described my career and contributions to sociolinguistics in a way that indicated he had been following what I was doing as if I were his own student. In both of these cases, Dell supported me at turning points in my career, and I will always be grateful to him for that.

Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo, University of California, Davis