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● Keith Brown

Editor-in-Chief, *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Second Edition

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"It is perhaps surprising to find that almost every university in Britain, new and old, teaches an undergraduate course that has a linguistics component. I imagine it's similar in America. I don't mean that linguistics is taught in every degree course but that there are linguistic components in quite an extraordinary number of degrees. That is part of the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline."

How did you become interested in language and linguistics?

I was an undergraduate at Cambridge studying English. I became interested in Middle and Old English. When I was an undergraduate, linguistics wasn't an undergraduate subject. I think the first systematic teaching of linguistics in Britain was by John Lyons in Edinburgh in 1964 or thereabouts. The first professor of linguistics in Britain was appointed in 1944 to the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London.

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I know after you left Cambridge you joined the British Council. Did you develop an interest in linguistics during this time?

When I left Cambridge I joined the British Council and went to Uganda where I encountered some linguistics in the context of English language teaching, but that wasn't what I was doing there. I was a representative of the British Council. I mostly lectured on various aspects of life in Britain.

Later we moved to Ghana. My appointment was as a lecturer in English at the University College of Cape Coast, and initially I was teaching English literature. Increasingly I became interested in African languages. My interest was initially sparked the pronunciation of English by Ghanaians because it's clearly influenced by local African languages and I became interested in the nature of this interference. I was also interested to know whether or not some of the characteristic grammatical patterns that they produced were also interference phenomena from local languages. At the end of the first year in Ghana we invited some people down to Cape Coast from the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana to come and talk to us about the phonology of the local indigenous language and the influence this had on their English production. This was very interesting to me. They suggested that I go and do a master's degree in African languages and linguistics at the University of Ghana, which I did. I never got to the end of it though because towards the end of my first year my wife and I, who were both teaching in Cape Coast, were invited to go to Edinburgh and qualify ourselves for linguistics and English language, and so we went to Edinburgh. My wife took a diploma in phonetics at Edinburgh and went on to do a doctoral degree in a Ugandan language. I did a diploma in what was then called general linguistics and went on to do a doctoral degree in Akan, the largest Ghanaian language.

What did you think of living in Africa?

I thought it was absolutely wonderful. I loved it. We had two children in Uganda, and a child in Ghana.

When they moved to Edinburgh were they still young?

They were 2, 4, and 5. They all came in a rush.

Did you meet your wife at Cambridge?

Yes. We were both doing English undergraduate degrees. Very romantic [laughter].

The official language in both Uganda and Ghana is English, correct?

The language of higher education is English and the language of administration is English. In Uganda and Ghana there are a variety of local languages. The one I was working on is a language called Akan, which is the principle language of central and southern Ghana.

Do you speak that language?

I used to, but time goes on, doesn't it?

It seems you learned a lot at Edinburgh.

Yes. When I was first appointed at Edinburgh, the professor, John Lyons, believed strongly that his staff should not simply be specialists in one particular sub-field, but should also be familiar with the whole discipline. That doesn't happen so much today, because nowadays you are a syntactician or phonetician, etc. In those days, we all taught whatever it was for three years and then went and taught something else because John wanted us to be knowledgeable across the field. So, during my time in Edinburgh I taught what were known then as the "core disciplines" - syntax, morphology, phonetics, phonology and so on - and also the "hyphenated disciplines" socio-, psycho-, stylistics etc. .

Do you think that is a good idea?

I think it was a very interesting idea. It's not what happens today because people are much more narrowly specialized. It suited me very well because I got to know the whole field of linguistics and it meant from a very early time my particular interest in linguistics was very interdisciplinary. While I was at Edinburgh I also became the Secretary of the School of Cognitive Science, which was a new interdisciplinary development at the time - we had a degree teaching artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, semantics and linguistics. It was the first master's degree in cognitive science in Britain. It did very well and has gone on to do well.

What facet of linguistics has interested you most?

My main interest has always been syntax - though I have always been interested in interdisciplinary work. Over the years I've been increasingly interested in English grammar and semantics.

Your interest in syntax started very early, didn't it?

Yes. Believe it or not, I took my master's degree in Edinburgh in 1963, the year before Noam Chomsky's *Aspects in the Theory of Syntax* was published. That's a very long time ago.

After Edinburgh you were a research professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Essex. How long were you there?

I went to the University of Essex in 1984 as a reader (professor), and in 1989 became a research professor.

After leaving the University of Essex, you returned to the University of Cambridge with your wife?

We have taught in the same department for 40 years! Now there is a mysterious thing! We both went from Edinburgh where we were in the same department, to Essex where we were in the same department, and then she was appointed to a professorship in Cambridge. She came to Cambridge to be the Founder of The Research Center for English and Applied Linguistics. I stayed in Essex for another three or four years, and then came to join her in that research department. There I was a research fellow in the research center. I've stayed attached to the research center ever since. Now I'm retired and have been for four or five years, but I'm listed as adjunct staff.

I'm not employed by them though still associated with them.

Has your wife retired?

Yes.

How did you come to be the Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2 nd Edition (ELL2)?

I was subject editor for syntax in the first edition. After the book was published I did two spin-off volumes. one on "Syntactic Theories" and another on "Grammatical Categories" . They were collections of articles from the first edition of the encyclopedia which were published as separate books.

And the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (ELL1) was published in 1994?

Yes. The Editor-in-Chief of ELL1, Ron Asher, is a colleague of mine in the Department of Linguistics from Edinburgh. If you look, most of the editors of ELL1 had some connection with the Edinburgh Linguistics Department!

How is this edition different from the first edition? I've read that it's a completely different work.

Yes, it is a completely different work, but there are inevitably some similarities. Let me tell you the similarities first, and then go on to the differences. In the first edition Asher wanted to cover the whole width of the discipline, deal with linguistics in the theoretical sense and all aspects of linguistics, and with languages and the use of languages. We wanted to maintain this wide spread in ELL2. It is new and different in the sense that it is much larger than ELL1, has about twice as many editors, a lot more sections, and almost all of the articles are absolutely brand new. Some of the titles are the same because it's rather difficult in a work of this kind not to repeat titles, but if you look at them they are actually different articles. It's not the same article reprinted, nor is it the same article revised, it's a brand new article starting from scratch.

Did you also add new topics?

Yes, there are many, many new topics. It is, in essence, a brand new work.

You said in your Introduction that the field has grown in its own specializations in interdisciplinary fields. Can you give me a couple examples?

Yes. In the central areas of linguistics the sections on syntax, semantics etc are all expanded and made up-to-date; and there is a new section on typology as well as interdisciplinary sections on philosophy, anthropology, educational linguistics and so on. The text linguistics area has been expanded greatly with a new section of spoken discourse. In the area of psycholinguistics there are large new sections on neurolinguistics and cognitive science as an expanded section on language acquisition. Then there is greatly expanded coverage of the general area of computational linguistics and the applications of computational techniques to linguistic analysis, in corpus linguistics for instance.

What is corpus linguistics?

A corpus is a collection of a body of either spoken or written text, and computational linguistics is used to analyze that text. It is language that is collected in real life and then analyzed. For example, the traditional approach to the construction of grammars has been to rely on intuition. That is, to look into your mind and see what sentences you think are, or are not, grammatical. If you are using a corpus then what you would do is go out and collect data from the real world and analyze them so that you could say this isn't how I *feel* it is, but I can *demonstrate* that this is how it is because I can show you that my corpus has got these things in it. If you want to connect this up with a theoretical point of view, Chomsky makes a distinction between what he calls competence and what he calls performance. Competence is what the native speakers understanding is of the nature of his language as it is embodied in his mental perception. Performance is what it is that people actually say. Competence is kind of error free, whereas

performance is often absolutely stuffed full of error because it involves hesitations and changing of mind and thinking as you speak and so on. One of the reasons why people have been interested in corpora is because they reflect real, genuine, not-invented language.

Was there coverage of corpus linguistics and computational linguistics in ELL1?

There was some, but there was 10 years between ELL1 and ELL2 and in an area like computation that is a lifetime. The areas of psycho-linguistics, language pathology and language acquisition have also vastly increased in ELL2. The language pathology section deals with a discipline called neuro-linguistics, which hardly existed in ELL1 at the time.

It's hard to imagine how you were able to get this whole thing organized. There are so many topics and so many volumes to this work.

Well, as I said, I had this peculiarly eclectic linguistic upbringing, where I was required to do all these things.

How did you begin to plan such a large project?

When we had our first planning meeting with Chris Pringle and Sarah Oates with Elsevier they declared that ELL2 was to be 10-15% larger than ELL1.

So you went from 10 volumes with ELL1 to 14 volumes with ELL2?

Yes. Each of the individual sections was to be expanded and some of the original sections were split up into sub-sections.

How long did you work on this project?

It started around August 2003. It's been put together amazingly quickly thanks to the work and cooperation of the coordinating editors and section editors, who worked very assiduously. The in-house editorial staff at Elsevier was also very efficient.

Was this project a full-time undertaking, or were you busy with other projects at the same time?

When I first started I was teaching at the University of Düsseldorf, and then I went off to teach at the University of Vienna, and all the time I was teaching part-time at Cambridge.

That's impressive. What would you like librarians to know about ELL2?

I'd like them to know about its breadth of coverage, that it is up-to-date, and interdisciplinary. It covers all of the linguistic disciplines and all of the related linguistic disciplines. In addition, it has descriptions of some 400 languages and accounts of the language situation in nearly 300 countries. If you look at the list of section editors, you will see that the departments they come from are very varied indeed. Secondly, the fact that we haven't reprinted articles from ELL1, but have started again from scratch means that we are very up-to-date. And lastly, this encyclopedia is interdisciplinary. Comparatively, ELL2 is 14 volumes compared to Oxford's 2nd Edition of the International Encyclopedia of Linguistics which is only 4 volumes, so our coverage is vastly larger.

Who is the intended audience of this work?

Obviously, academics and professionals in linguistics and the adjacent fields. For example, professionals in medicine or anthropology or whatever it may be who are interested in aspects of language and how language infringes on their discipline. In addition, we would like to think it will be a benchmark reference work for university teachers in linguistics and interdisciplinary fields, and for researchers and doctoral and Ph.D students – high school students should also find it approachable.

Is language and linguistics becoming a more popular subject to study?

Until last year I was the chair of the linguistics section of The Subject Center for Language, Linguistics and Area Studies, an initiative from the funding councils in the UK set up to interest itself in curriculum matters in universities. It is perhaps surprising to find that almost every university in Britain, new and old, teaches an undergraduate course that has a linguistics

component. I imagine it's similar in America. I don't mean that linguistics is taught in every degree course but that there are linguistic components in quite an extraordinary number of degrees. That is part of the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline. Ten years ago I was chair of a group " benchmarking" linguistics study in the UK, that is, setting out the kind of knowledge about the subject one would expect for first degrees in linguistics. In 2002 there were 69 higher education institutions offering 645 courses which include linguistics as part of an undergraduate degree. These numbers have increased since then. Linguistics is now so widely spread that you'll find there are large numbers of departments of one kind or another which are interested in linguistics.

Are there more people getting degrees in language and linguistics?

In this country most of the larger universities have single honors degrees in linguistics and increasingly there are large numbers of degrees in English language and linguistics. That's because the government is interested in educational standards in English language. Then it goes out into almost every area that you can think of; philosophy, psychology, speech and language therapy, communication and media studies, and, of course, languages.

What are currently the most popular areas of study for linguistics and language?

I would guess the popular student choices are applications of linguistics, something to do with socio-linguistics or psycho-linguistics.

What has been your biggest contribution to your field? Does it include this encyclopedia?

I think it will turn out to be.

What has been the highlight of your career?

Oh, that's hard to say. I have had a very varied experience and have enjoyed everything, I really have.

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