

EDITOR'S NOTE

The current issue of *Language in Society* features four articles with a single topic in common – gender and language. For this issue, I realized that by jumping one paper already in hand over a couple of others I could achieve the felicitous result of a relatively unified issue – and now that *Language in Society* is at five issues a year, the “jumpees” will only have to wait two months for publication in any case. My usual practice is that articles are published in strict order of acceptance – very occasionally, an author will take so long to get the very last revision – the i-dotting and t-crossing and reference-checking – done that the article will lag in publication. Extremely long articles sometimes get delayed an issue. And once or twice I have speeded up publication of an article which languished an unfairly long time in the review process.

While a relatively unified issue is a nice accidental result of the flow of volunteered manuscripts, “special issues” are quite another matter. I receive half-a-dozen queries a year about the publication of special issues, usually involving several papers that appeared together in a single round table or symposium at a professional meeting. I have been very reluctant to respond positively to such queries – indeed, I have yet to do so. The flow of excellent manuscripts is such that authors are already waiting a year between acceptance and publication, even with the move from four to five issues a year (which I assure you, gentle readers, is experienced as a “speed-up” in the Editor’s Office!). To justify breaking into this flow with a special issue, it would have to impress me as a collection of papers of paradigm-shifting importance. Second, the journal can only accommodate four or, at the maximum, five articles of the usual length in each issue, while proposed special issues usually include six, seven or more papers. Third, anyone who has ever reviewed edited volumes for publishing houses will know that the articles included are often quite uneven in quality, and it’s very difficult to work with eager editors to convince them to regretfully decline to include manuscripts from friends, students, or, worst of all, influential senior colleagues and mentors (as a mere referee, one doesn’t face this problem – but the editor does). Finally, there is a genuine danger that one or more authors in a group will be late or will default with manuscripts. Murphy’s Law predicts that these will be the very manuscripts that were most attractive to this editor. In summary, I don’t want to make a categorical rule against special issues, because as soon as I do that the next proposal in over the transom will be the one that makes me change my mind. But I would urge those who are contemplating proposing special issues to think through the issues I’ve mentioned here, and consider other, more likely, avenues toward collective publication.