

Editorial

It wasn't my idea. It was Charles Ferguson's. I was the fall guy.

I was attending the Second International Conference on Language Acquisition in Florence in September 1972 with nothing more to do than give a paper on early intonation development, and enjoy the experience of meeting face-to-face child language researchers who previously I had encountered only in print. The business meeting was wide-ranging—as one would expect in a fledgling organization—dealing with basic questions such as subscription levels and how often to meet. And towards the end, Fergie raised the question of a journal.

He made a very convincing speech, pointing out that articles on the subject were scattered throughout a range of psychological, sociological, and linguistic journals. The time had come, he said, to start a journal exclusively devoted to child language acquisition. And he concluded by asking “Does anyone know a journal publisher?” Maybe I nodded too noticeably, for I realized that everyone was then looking at me—a mere assistant editor on the *Journal of Linguistics* at the time, but evidently an ideal contact with a possible publisher, Cambridge University Press, which I knew well, for it had published two of my books.

Everything then happened very quickly. The business meeting reacted with great enthusiasm to the idea, and I was asked to progress it as soon as possible, and (by the way) would I edit it? I pointed out that there were several people in the room far better qualified than me, who was the least in the kingdom of child language acquisition at the time—I had published hardly anything in the field—but it seems that editorial experience outranked specialism, for nobody else put themselves forward. However, everyone promised to help, and when Cambridge University Press showed immediate interest in the idea, I had no difficulty getting ten of the leading CLA scholars to form a reading committee, and another twenty to make up an advisory board. Michael Garman agreed to be assistant editor, with Paul Fletcher joining the following year, and the first issue appeared in due course, in May 1974. That's probably something of a journal record—eighteen months from initial conception to publication.

In my first editorial I drew attention to three general aims: to represent the diversity of theoretical approaches to the subject, to explore a wide range of methodologies, and to build up the store of data on languages other than English, particularly on non-European languages. The first two of these aims have been well achieved, as a glance at any issue will show. So has the third, by comparison with what went before, but here there are no grounds for complacency.

Of the 1,532 articles and notes in the forty issues, just over a fifth (334) have a language other than English (or the word ‘cross-linguistic’) in their title. The figure would rise a bit if I included languages mentioned inside articles dealing with bilingualism, but not by much. For the record, here’s a summary of the language situation, as of the end of 2013.

The top three ‘other languages’ are French (45), Chinese (38), and Spanish (33). Then comes Italian (24), Japanese (22), and German (21), then Hebrew (17), Dutch (12), Tamil (10), and Korean (10). Everything else has less than ten: Russian (9), Finnish (7), Polish (6), and Swedish (5). Arabic, Catalan, Hindi, Hungarian, and Norwegian have four each; Estonian, Greek, Inuktitut, Irish, Portuguese, and Turkish have three; BSL, Icelandic, Quiché Mayan, Sesotho, Tagalog, Thai, and Warlpiri have two; and there are 23 with just a solitary article to their name: Afrikaans, ASL, Bulgarian, Chintang, Danish, Esperanto, Galician, Huli, Latino, Lithuanian, Mayan, Navajo, Ngas, Quechua, Romanian, Samoan, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, Setswana, Slovenian, Swahili, Telugu, and Ukrainian. Only 20 of these are languages outside Europe. Given the presence of 6,000+ languages in the world, it seems we have still some way to go to put typological flesh on our hypotheses, with several language families having no representation at all in this list.

Anything more nuanced than this, by way of retrospective analysis, would require a proper indexing of JCL – an aim incidentally, which would be well worth pursuing. A fifth sounds great, and so it is; but that still means – insofar as the journal is a good reflection of what is ‘out there’ – four-fifths of what we know about children’s language is still derived from English. So, all power to JCL as it continues to boldly go where no journal has gone before.

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