

COMMITTEE ON THE FACULTY RESEARCH LECTURE
Annual Report 2005-06

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

The Faculty Research Lecture Committee is extremely pleased to nominate Professor Geoffrey K. Pullum of the Linguistics Department as the Faculty Research Lecturer for 2006-7. Even a cursory glance at Geoff's CV will attest to his extraordinary research profile. The works range all the way from the most detailed, microscopic studies of the basic elements of language, such as grammar and phonetics, to meta-theoretical explorations of what language is and where it comes from.

Geoff's achievement that most attracted our attention is of course the *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, published in 2002. Written with eminent grammarian Rodney Huddleston plus nine other authors, the *CGEL* is an 1842-page tome that is not only exhaustive but also highly innovative in its treatment of English grammar. The *CGEL* is the first grammar of English that simultaneously aims to be comprehensive and to reflect theoretical developments in our understanding of natural language syntax that have emerged over the last thirty years or so. It rethinks significant parts of the grammar itself, adopting new concepts and abolishing old ones in the interest of logical economy and empirical accuracy. There being no other comparable work in any other language, the *CGEL* is truly unique.

In addition to receiving universal critical acclaim, the *CGEL* was selected in 2003 as the recipient of the seventh biennial Leonard Bloomfield Award, an honor accorded every other year by the Linguistic Society of America to the single most important contribution in that period to the discipline of linguistics.

The *CGEL*, grand as it is, represents only a fraction of Geoff's enormous range. He is one of the leaders who created a new class of linguistic theories called *constraint-based grammars*, which have evolved into one of the most active areas of linguistic research. He has also worked on morphology, the relation of morphology to word order, the mathematical properties of grammars, computational linguistics, the biological foundations (or not) of linguistic theory, etc. His special contribution in all these areas has been to insist on rigorous analysis and to formulate as economically as possible the basic requirements that any successful theory must meet. This continuing, penetrating critique, much of which appeared for several years in the "Topic...Comment" columns of *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, has been highly influential in moving the field forward.

Geoff's knowledge of languages outside English is also wide-ranging. His *Phonetic Symbol Guide*, with Bill Ladusaw, is a complete survey of the hundreds of characters used by linguists to record the sounds of the world's languages. He has written about Somali grammar, Jamaican grammar, and phonology in French. Not to mention the *fourth* volume of his *Handbook of Amazonian Languages*, co-edited with Desmond Derbyshire, which just appeared.

Good ideas are one thing, but the ability to communicate them counts, too. A major reason for Geoff's impact is his witty, breezy style. Even when writing for scholars, he manages to be highly entertaining. The "Topic...Comment" columns were collected into a very funny book that became a best-seller

among language mavens called *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax and Other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language*. A second popular book, called *Far from the Madding Gerund*, is about to appear based on essays from his website *Language Log*, run with Mark Liberman. A reviewer writes, "Often irreverent and hilarious, these brief essays take on many sacred cows, showing us--among many things--why Strunk & White is useless and how the College Board can't identify sentence errors in the SAT."

In recognition of his scholarly achievements, Geoff was elected in 2003 to the National Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2004 he was appointed as Distinguished Professor of Humanities at UCSC. This year he is a Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, where is working to complete his thirteenth book, entitled *New Logical Foundations for Linguistics*, a novel framework for linguistic theory grounded in logic and applied to problems in syntactic theories.

For his dazzling ability to teach and entertain at the same time, our committee is extremely pleased to nominate Geoffrey K. Pullum as the Faculty Research Lecturer for 2006-7.

Respectfully submitted,

COMMITTEE ON THE FACULTY RESEARCH LECTURE 2005-06

Jonathan Beecher
Raoul Birnbaum
Barbara Rogoff
Bakthan Singaram
Sandra Faber, Chair

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