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Life of a lame

Laurie Bauer

Victoria University of Wellington

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Life of a Lame

Laurie Bauer

I was brought up in semi-rural Yorkshire, where my parents moved when I was six years old. For important shopping trips, we went to Harrogate, and Leeds was the big smoke. Harrogate has certain pretensions to gentility, a result of its past as a sort of northern Bath. The facilities originally built for the spa have now changed Harrogate into a conference town. The Yorkshire dialect of the surrounding areas is consequently rather mitigated there.

In any case, although I grew up speaking Yorkshire of a type, it was not pure Yorkshire, since my family were not from the area. My father, a Londoner by birth and upbringing, was bilingual in French and English (my grandmother was French), and later added German when he went to school in Zurich. My mother was born in Wales to a family of Scots, and accommodated easily to both varieties all her life. Thus my English was modified by my surroundings to the extent that one of my peers at school once said of me, very disparagingly, that I couldn't 'even do a Yorkshire accent'. In Labov's terms, then, I was a 'lame'.

One of the benefits of a relatively well-to-do population in general was the existence of good schools. I attended King James's Grammar School (as it then was), where it turned out that my strongest subjects were modern languages. Accordingly, when the time came to go to university, I thought that modern languages were what I should be studying. Having been turned down by Cambridge after a disastrous interview in which I totally failed to say anything of value about the philosophy in Camus' *L'Étranger*, I was accepted at Edinburgh to do a course with the magnificent title of French Language with General Linguistics and Phonetics.

I had applied for that course for all the wrong reasons. It seemed that it offered a way of concentrating on language study and thus doing less literature. While I was perfectly happy to read the classics at that period, and had been awakened to the joys of Shakespeare by the teaching at school, I was far less keen to study literature, having come to the conclusion that studying literature was a game: you were asked about your opinions, but your opinions were only wanted if they confirmed the opinions of others; you were expected to find evidence to support these other opinions, and those who went along and played the game did well. Whether I would have been coaxed out of these narrow views if I had done English literature at university, I do not know. Certainly my lecturers in French and German literature failed to convince me of anything else. However, it scarcely mattered, because in my first year at university I discovered phonetics.

I arrived in Edinburgh in 1967. That was the year that David Abercrombie's *Elements of General Phonetics* (Abercrombie, 1967) was published, and it was used as the textbook for First Ordinary Phonetics, which I had to take in my first year. The teachers in that course were outstanding. The bulk of the lectures were given by W.E.

[Bill] Jones (who we all referred to with *lèse majesté* as 'Wedge'). He was a model of clarity in his presentations, and made everything seem wonderfully comprehensible. He drew attention to things which I'd noticed but couldn't talk about, and also pointed to a whole new world of details of speech. I was fascinated right from the start. I was fortunate to have John Laver as my tutor, and he also lectured on instrumental phonetics. Gill Brown lectured on tone and intonation, and taught me the importance of Linguistics as performance: she could perform the phenomena she was discussing, thus making them come alive in the lecture theatre, in a way that mere description could never have achieved.

1967 was one of the last years of First Ordinary Phonetics. It was soon to become 'Phonetics and Linguistics', which was probably a sound political and pedagogical move. Nevertheless, I feel privileged to have been able to attend that course, which – though I didn't realise it at the time – had a global reputation as an introductory phonetics course. Among others taking the course that year was Carlos Gussenhoven, who had come from the Netherlands for the experience.

In more recent years, I have sometimes thought that perhaps I should have stuck with phonetics rather than become a more general linguist. In particular, I was interested in dialectology which, since this was the period of Labov's New York studies, was just about to become big again. However, that is idle speculation, since I chose a different route. The reason is possibly of some interest. I did very badly in instrumental phonetics, which cost me my First Class Merit Certificate, and led me to believe that I couldn't cope with the aspects of phonetics required for more advanced study. However, I was very close to that First Class mark (something which was not given lightly in those days), and realised for the first time that I had the possibility of doing really well in this subject – a lesson I took with me to my later Linguistics courses. Those who did achieve First Class Merit Certificates had their names posted on the wall of the Department, on a list headed by Peter Ladefoged. That would have been a list worth getting on!

In my second year at university, I started linguistics. This was the year that John Lyons's *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Lyons, 1968) was published, and we used it as a textbook. Most students nowadays find it virtually impenetrable, but it was by far the best thing available at the time, when linguistics had not yet achieved the kind of status that makes it automatically part of the curriculum in so many universities today. Lyons's writing is an acquired taste, but I still find myself turning to the pages of the *Introduction* for clarification of fundamental points of linguistics.

Again we had good teachers, with a memorable and enthusiastic introduction to transformational generative grammar from Keith Brown, for example. The exception was morphology. I cannot recall the name of the person who lectured on morphology that year, but my fellow students and I sat round in the coffee-bar after the lectures and tried to work out what the lecture about morphology must have been trying to say, and inventing our own version. No doubt my own slightly idiosyncratic view of morphology stems from this first grappling with the topic.

The third year of my course was spent in France. Those of us doing linguistics were sent to university towns, where we could attend linguistics classes. In the event, the students at Aix-en-Provence spent the first term of 1969 on strike and nothing happened. My spoken German improved greatly, because of the number of foreign students in Aix, and I even learnt a little Italian. I'm not sure how much French I learnt.

And due largely to my own laziness I unfortunately learnt very little phonetics or linguistics.

Back in Edinburgh for the final year of the course, final Honours, things changed. We had lectures from John Lyons (on morphology, as well as on other matters, which may have straightened out my views slightly), Alan Kemp on phonology (I remember struggling with Chomsky and Halle's *Sound Pattern of English* for an essay I wrote, and enjoying the experience), David Abercrombie on the phonetics of the Romance languages, Ron Asher on semantics, John Christie on Chomskyan syntax, and Duncan Macmillan on homonymics (following the study by his mentor, John Orr). We also had papers taught in the French Department on the linguistics of French, the history of Romance, and ordinary language classes. I have vivid recollections of going to one language tutorial where we were actually given a lecture on uses of the subjunctive by someone who was not a linguist. It was not only boring, it was incomprehensible. The tutor was really cross with us when we failed to find all the subjunctives in the prose we had been set for that week's exercise, despite his teaching. It made me realise how unsystematic and how poorly explained most of the grammar we were presented with in foreign language classes was, and how different the approach of linguists to such material was from that of most language teachers.

Since I had no idea what I wanted to do at the end of my MA, I put off the evil decision. When I had arrived in Edinburgh, I had assumed that I would become a French teacher in a secondary school. At the end of my degree I was far less of a francophile than I had been at the start, and did not believe that I wanted to spend my life teaching French. However, the Leverhulme Trust advertised scholarships to study in a host of European countries for an eight month period. I applied to go to Denmark. The choice of country was determined partly by good sense and partly by stubbornness. I had spent a lot of my vacation time during my late teenage years hitchhiking round Europe, staying in youth hostels. I decided that of all the people I had met, the ones with whom I had invariably got on well were Danes. When I suggested this to acquaintances, they poured scorn on the notion of learning Danish. I should learn Norwegian or Swedish, and be comprehensible throughout Scandinavia. Danish was not a language, it was a disease of the throat. Such arguments simply made me more determined to go to Denmark. To my surprise and delight I was awarded one of the scholarships, and left for Denmark in September 1971. My first month was spent in Copenhagen doing language courses with Folkeuniversitetet, and then I moved to Aarhus, where I moved into a student residence and went to study at the Language Centre. Living in a student residence forced me to learn Danish. It was not easy at the beginning, but by the end of my eight months I could communicate, at least. Another output of that period was my first book: *Engleske Udtaleøvelser* ('English pronunciation exercises', Andersen & Bauer, 1975). At the Language Centre I went to classes on Applied Linguistics run by Frede Østergaard and Erik Andersen. Despite all their best attempts, I emerged from that experience feeling that I did not want to do more applied linguistics, but was keen to get back to some theoretical linguistics. So it was that I applied to do a PhD in Linguistics at Edinburgh.

I returned to Edinburgh in April of 1972 and worked on the Collins-Robert French-English dictionary project until I could start as a PhD student in October 1972.

I continued to work part-time on the dictionary through most of my PhD, helping to finance my studies and desire to travel by that means. I also taught the occasional vacation course in English as a Foreign Language for various private schools. Although I enjoyed exploiting the knowledge I gained from linguistics to explain English to the learner, I was far from convinced that I wanted to make a career doing nothing more than that. It seemed a more likely career than teaching French at that period, though.

The supervisors for my thesis were Duncan Macmillan and Jim Miller. Duncan Macmillan was a controversial figure in Edinburgh at the time, just a few years before his retirement, unpopular in many quarters, but never among his particular students. He spoke French with an elegance and accuracy that made us all feel embarrassed for our own level of achievement, and had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of the French language. He turned out to be a good supervisor, too, being able to guide someone who was working within a theoretical framework that he did not himself espouse without discouragement or disparagement. Jim Miller, relatively fresh from his own PhD at the time, was the person I dealt with most closely. He read material from me on a regular basis, provided vital feedback and encouragement and shaped the PhD experience for me. The other person who was very influential on my development at this period was John Anderson, a revolutionary thinker whose ideas were exciting and frustratingly difficult to pin down. I have since criticised his works in a number of publications, but have always found the ideas worthy of consideration. John Lyons must have left Edinburgh for Sussex during this period, but was a presence in the Department, as was Roger Lass. The years of my PhD were extremely busy, and I worked hard, and played by travelling back to Denmark at every possible opportunity.

I finished my PhD within the three assigned years, and after a number of applications for jobs, was fortunate to get a job in the English Department at Odense University, Denmark, starting in September 1975. The Professor of English language was Hans Hartvigsson, an extremely colourful character, and the Professor of Nordic Languages was Hans Basbøll, who taught me a great deal of phonology. My colleague Leif Kvistgaard Jakobsen, who moved on from academia to the business world soon after I left Denmark, taught me a lot about dealing with students and presenting material for them.

In the northern summer of 1976 I married Winifred, a New Zealander who I had met in Edinburgh four years earlier, and we spent our vacation period travelling to New Zealand to meet her family. That was my first visit to New Zealand, but it meant that when a job was advertised in Wellington, I had some idea of what the city looked like, and some reason for thinking that New Zealand would be a pleasant place to live, and I applied for the position. I had been applying for jobs because my contract in Odense was in principle only a short-term one, and positions in linguistics were in short supply. Nevertheless, I was surprised to get the position: the advertisement had specified an ability to teach historical linguistics, a skill I did not believe I had.

At that time, John Pride was Professor of English Language. As many others did, I found him an awkward character to deal with. Although he had an international reputation for his writings on sociolinguistics, he had few sociolinguistic skills in everyday interaction. He was, for example, prone to the overuse of the adjective *bloody*, which he used like a thirteen-year-old, uncertain as to how it fitted in his sentences, but enjoying the naughtiness of it. More seriously, though, he was at best

an unenthusiastic supporter of formal language study, believing that the social aspect of language was the only one worth studying. On more than one occasion he used his sociolinguistic classes to denigrate straight unhyphenated linguistics – a position which was not at all helpful in a small group. I believe that he did a great deal of harm to the New Zealand secondary school curriculum by removing all study of grammar from a generation of students. I coped with him by avoiding him as much as possible.

Fortunately, my other colleagues were much more compatible. Janet Holmes and I cooperated for a number of years on the introductory Linguistics class, and worked well as a team. In later years we introduced a class on New Zealand English, dividing the material along predictable lines, with me doing the phonetics, phonology, grammar and lexis and Janet covering the sociolinguistic situation and social dialectological studies. And until he moved on to the English Language Institute (as it still was then), Graeme Kennedy taught the introduction to transformational grammar. Among other skills these two passed on to me was an understanding of the arcane ways of university administration, and how to get things done – something which became more difficult as the administration of the university grew.

The first paper I published after coming to New Zealand was 'The second Great Vowel Shift?' (Bauer, 1979). Although my predecessor in the job I now held, Peter Hawkins, had done some work on the phonology of New Zealand English, and Colin Bowley at Auckland had done some useful descriptive work, the academic study of New Zealand English was really in its infancy at that stage. My paper on New Zealand English phonetics and phonology (Bauer, 1986), first drafted while on leave in 1983, was a position paper on what we knew at the time. The detail has been filled in considerably since then, thanks to a lot of work by Janet Holmes and Allan Bell within a Labovian paradigm and thanks to a large amount of work at the University of Canterbury, associated with Elizabeth Gordon and Margaret Maclagan and, more recently, Jen Hay. Janet Holmes also did a lot of invaluable work on the pragmatics of New Zealand English, whose focus was really the pragmatic problems, but which had the effect of making New Zealand English a well-known variety, internationally. My early work on the grammar of New Zealand English has been developed much further by Marianne Hundt and Heidi Quinn. Because of work done by Janet Holmes and Graeme Kennedy, we also created the Wellington Corpora of New Zealand English at Victoria University. I was nominally in charge of the Written corpus (see Bauer, 1993), and the written side of the ICE corpus which we compiled – largely thanks to the work of innumerable student research assistants – a few years later. Those remain extremely useful research tools (although they are now showing their age), but had the effect of putting me off corpus creation, while leaving me with a great admiration for those who have the patience and the eye for detail such work requires.

My work in morphology was remarkably little affected by the fact that I was in New Zealand. I simply worked in isolation, dealing with those questions I found to be interesting, and presenting papers at overseas conferences when I got the chance. It must be remembered that this was just before the advent of ubiquitous email, and contact with Europe was still slow. I became a morphologist more or less by chance. When I arrived in New Zealand, I still thought of myself as a syntactician, my PhD thesis having dealt with the application of various syntactic theories to the problem of nominal compounding. It wasn't until after the publication of *English Word-formation* (Bauer, 1983) that others began to see me (and I began to see myself) as a morphologist.

I was fortunate that my *Introducing Linguistic Morphology* (Bauer, 1988) was published by Edinburgh University Press just when a subject editor for morphology was being sought for the Pergamon *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (published as Asher, 1994). Being part of that project gave me a whole lot of new contacts and strengthened old ones. It was also from about this period onwards that I was able to visit Europe more often, so that I felt much less isolated than I had up to that point.

When I arrived in New Zealand, Linguistics was taught in a number of places, but was really secure only in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Over the next decade or so, it became much better established, with departments of Linguistics eventually arising in each of those three centres, before being reabsorbed into larger entities in all three places as fashions in university administration changed. While numbers in undergraduate linguistics held relatively firm at Victoria University, despite the loss of a host of Malaysian students when we changed our name from English Language to Linguistics, the number of honours students dropped when the government introduced fees for honours courses. Although it is hard to prove cause and effect here, the coincidence of timing is extremely suspicious. On the other hand, the government has also been responsible for an increase in PhD students since it opted to reduce fees for international students to the same level as for domestic students. Although this gives rise to a large amount of work, processing and rejecting applications from unsuitable aspiring students, we have had some very good international candidates in the programme. However, the loss of continuing home students remains a problem both for the programme and for the tertiary sector as a whole, since the best of our students would do honours and possibly an MA in New Zealand, a PhD overseas and then return to work in New Zealand. The chances of that happening now seem to be falling.

New Zealand is still in a period of change from the Old School of those who feature in this collection of essays to the new scholars. Linguistics in New Zealand is changing with their increasing influence – as it should, of course – but it is not yet clear to me what directions it is now taking. However, in the future it is likely to be beset by the same problems that have affected it for some years. We have been fortunate to have some extremely competent linguists in New Zealand. There have been two results of this. The first is that many of them have been recruited into the ranks of university administration and functioned as deans, and on major university committees. I was Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research for the last five years of my time at Victoria, which I found rewarding but exhausting. It certainly cut back on my linguistics research in that period, and I am sure others have had similar experiences. The other is that the various funding agencies, in particular the Marsden fund, encourage staff winning their support to buy out of low-level teaching. This offers experience to up-coming scholars, but means that the people who are probably the very best teachers are kept out of the classroom, which must be detrimental to the next generation of students.

Part of the result of having been in New Zealand for so many years, is that I have been out of the mainstream of linguistic theory, often discovering at overseas conferences that new trends have become important without my having noticed them. My 1983 book *English Word-formation* came out just early enough to miss a large amount of theorising about level ordering. Although I kept myself up-to-date with the introduction of Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar in the early 1980s, I lost track of developments in Chomskyan syntax at about the same time, and have been left

with a feeling of unease as it seems to have become more a theory of grammars and less a theory about languages. I have been influenced by various theoretical trends, including Natural Morphology, Construction Grammar, and Exemplar Theory, but without becoming involved in the details of any of them, and I have never become part of the teams of insiders developing these theories. Although I have occasionally made contributions to theoretical debates, I have focussed much more in descriptive areas of Linguistics in my own research. Indeed, I think it is the descriptive focus which unites the various strands of my research.

I would like to think that I have been something of an innovator in what I have done. My early work on New Zealand English pronunciation helped in making the study of the local variety academically respectable, and helped spread the use of Wells's (1982) lexical sets in such descriptions. When I wrote *Introducing Linguistic Morphology* (Bauer, 1988), the last textbook on Morphology had been Matthews's (1974) Cambridge book, a decade earlier, and before that there was nothing back to Nida (1946). In the few years following my own book, several others hit the library shelves. When I wrote *Watching English Change* (Bauer, 1994), it was the first serious attempt to deal with developments in twentieth-century standard English in the light of Labovian theory. Others have since taken the idea much further, and done it better and in much more detail. My book on international varieties of English (Bauer, 2002) was the first to consider these in terms of the linguistic features rather than in terms of the particular varieties being discussed. My work on diminutives and augmentatives (Bauer, 1996, 1997) broke new ground by considering these formations across a range of languages, and not just in a few closely-related ones. My article on the typology of compounding (Bauer 2001) again looked at patterns across a wide range of genetically and geographically diverse languages, and did not assume that European languages were typical, or give them any pride of place. *The Oxford reference guide to English morphology*, on which I collaborated with Shelly Lieber and Ingo Plag (Bauer et al., 2013), showed the importance of real data in the study of morphology. While I cannot take great credit for that aspect of the book, it is something which I think will be a lasting contribution of the work. I have become known as a writer of textbooks, which is not something I ever aspired to, but it is not something I regret. Making sense of the fundamentals of any subject is a demanding task, and explaining it to beginners is even harder. The British RAE and, to a lesser extent, the New Zealand PBRF system tend to denigrate textbooks, and I feel this is a great error.

I was amazed, and amused, to discover in the mid 1990s that there were some people in Europe who apparently believed there to be two Laurie Bauers, one who wrote on morphology and one who wrote on sociolinguistic matters (including New Zealand English). That they should believe this is, I suppose, a compliment on the extent and value of the material I have produced. The link for me is the focus on understanding language systems and the complexities of what speakers of languages deal with on a daily basis. This is what I enjoyed as a first year undergraduate, and that interest has stayed with me for forty years.

I have always enjoyed undergraduate teaching (though not the associated marking!), but found supervision much harder. Perhaps this is because I had so few opportunities for it in my early years as a teacher (there were few PhDs in Linguistics in New Zealand at that period), and because my first thesis students were essentially self-motivated and required little direction. It was only in my last few years of

employment that I got a series of PhD students, with Liza Tarasova and Natalia Beliaeva in particular forcing me to confront issues in cognitive linguistics, and challenging my views on the areas of morphology in which they were working. I wish I had had more students like them.

In the last few years, I have received three major honours: being elected a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 2012, winning the Linguistic Society of America's coveted Leonard Bloomfield prize in 2015 for Bauer et al. (2013) – evidence of the benefits of working as a member of a team – and being awarded the Royal Society's Humanities/Aronui medal for 2017. On reflecting on these, I am aware that my career has often been helped by people who have seen things in me that I have not seen in myself, and have provided support and encouragement.

Since I retired, I have discovered that I have not run out of ideas for things to say about linguistic structures, and that much may be achieved part-time when there are no competing pressures. I am grateful for the enthusiasm for language which my teachers at Edinburgh and my colleagues and students elsewhere have inculcated into me. It continues to motivate me.

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