

Obituary

John Pride, Professor of English Language at Victoria University between 1979 and 1985, died recently in England. He will be remembered by colleagues as one of the most influential sociolinguists of the 1970s and 1980s. He had an unparalleled grasp of the huge field of sociolinguistics, and a remarkable ability to synthesise it. The book of readings *Sociolinguistics* published by Penguin in 1972 became required reading in sociolinguistics courses all over the world. It was based on a graduate course we taught together at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, and it represented his perceptions of the important researchers and central issues in the field at the time - perceptions which, in retrospect, have proved remarkably accurate.

John Pride found his way into academia relatively late; he was 25 before he first enrolled at Edinburgh University to study English Language and Literature. During the 1960s he taught English in a number of places including Edinburgh University, Gothenburg University in Sweden, and in Somalia and Mongolia. By the time he began teaching at the University of Leeds in the 1960s he had discovered sociolinguistics and he embraced it enthusiastically, recognising that it offered a means of making sense of some of the disturbing questions which had been raised by his experiences teaching English to people from non-British cultures.

His enjoyment of English Language studies persisted throughout his career and he was very proud that his Chair at Victoria University of Wellington was a Chair in English Language. Indeed, he did his utmost to promote English Language studies within sociolinguistics throughout his time at Victoria.

John Pride's work focussed on variation and diversity in language use, and his examples were aimed at illustrating the complexity of real speech. He opposed the formalism of current models in theoretical linguistics, and he argued strongly that linguists should study real language in context, not idealised sentences produced in a vacuum.

John also made an impact on the way English was taught in New Zealand secondary schools. When he first arrived in New Zealand, he found an English curriculum which taught English grammar in a way he considered to be over-structured, over-formal and out-of-touch with the way English was used in everyday interaction. As Subject Convenor in English for what was the Universities Entrance Board, he became a vociferous and effective critic of this approach to the teaching of English language in schools, and he campaigned vigorously for its replacement with an approach to describing English which school pupils could relate to their own experience. He advocated topics such as the language of advertising, formal and informal English, the language of law, and the language of political persuasion. His enthusiasm was such that he rapidly reformed the secondary school curriculum in this area from the top downwards, and for the last two decades the New Zealand English

curriculum has included a wide range of topics which reflect his influence, and, in particular, his conviction that a sociolinguistic approach was essential for a proper understanding of the way English works.

Those who were taught by John Pride will remember the enthusiasm with which he presented material in lectures and tutorials, and his remarkable ability to synthesise material from many disparate sources. His lectures, his book *The Social Meaning of Language*, and his scholarly articles provided a unique overview of the important concepts in sociolinguistics, and reflected his remarkable ability to identify the crucial concepts and distil the essential components for the benefit of those less widely read than he himself.

John Pride retired from the Chair at Victoria in 1985 due to ill health and returned to England where he spent his retirement in Cornwall and then Hampshire. His premature death by drowning in November 1993 leaves a real gap in sociolinguistics, but the academic impact of his scholarly contribution to the field will be felt for many decades to come.

Janet Holmes

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