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Judith T. Irvine and the Social Life of Scholarship

The editors of this issue had the pleasure of meeting with Judith T. Irvine in her backyard in Ann Arbor, MI in late August 2021. As we sat around her patio table, the view of the garden and the wetlands below provided a sense of respite from the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic over the last year and a half. Judy was our advisor during our doctoral studies at the University of Michigan, where she taught from 1999 to 2020 and was appointed Edward Sapir Collegiate Professor of Linguistic Anthropology in 2006 and Edward Sapir Distinguished University Professor of Linguistic Anthropology in 2019. Our conversation with her over white wine and Italian cuisine gave us the opportunity to listen to her recollections and insights, not as PhD students fresh from the field, but as faculty members with our own students, research agendas, and ideas of what our own contributions might be. Throughout her esteemed career, Judy's work on language ideologies, the semiotics of social differentiation, and language and political economy has been foundational to the field of linguistic anthropology. Her recent book with Susan Gal, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) reimagines some of the seminal concepts that have influenced scholars for decades.

Our discussion of Judy's scholarly trajectory ranged from topics of institution building to math to the role of history in linguistic anthropology, with sporadic talk about the pandemic, children, and pets. The wide scope of the conversation reflects the fact that Judy has treated her mentees as whole people, and modeled for us ways to navigate the social life of scholarship. While her influence on our work is pronounced, Judy is the first to encourage innovation and new directions in linguistic anthropological research among her students. We hope this dynamic is evident in this special issue, where nine of her former students and mentees contribute articles based on their original research and thinking. These pieces reflect insights into Judy's important and enduring work while also underscoring their own theoretical, methodological, and political concerns. The authors investigate diverse ethnographic, historical, and textual/media scenes that illustrate the workings of language ideologies, participant roles and structures, performance, interdiscursivity and shadow conversations, and honorific languages. Collectively, they act to honor a respected senior colleague and dear friend, who has had a profound impact in developing the theories and institutional practices of linguistic

anthropology. In this brief introduction we reflect on Judy, both as a scholar and a whole person.

Judy, who was born in Baltimore, MD, was raised to be curious and ambitious, and to be attuned to linguistic variation. Her parents came to the US from Europe in the 1930s. She grew up in an intellectually rich environment. Her father, who was an academic in the field of the history of medicine, had an ambitious attitude toward learning. He would share with her his abiding principles, including that if you don't know something, you look it up or find out, you don't just sweep it under the rug. Also greatly influential in shaping Judy's writing is his tenet that prose should be clear and accessible. He would note that if you are a smart person, like he considered Judy, and you cannot understand something that you read, it is probably the author's fault and not yours. He read many languages, including German, French, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Greek, and Arabic. Her mother was also proficient in languages. Judy heard German and Yiddish spoken with her parents and their friends at home and in high school she studied French, Latin, and Greek. She took courses in Arabic at Harvard University (Radcliffe College) and picked up some Hebrew along the way, before later turning to African languages.

Judy studied at a time when Radcliffe was little more than a collection of dormitories and women did not even have direct access to the Harvard undergraduate library. She was interested in both mathematics and anthropology, and took courses in both from her first semester. She ultimately decided to pursue anthropology, in part because she liked the idea of research about people living in very different social worlds. While her success in this field can be attributed to her intelligence, ingenuity, and perseverance, in our conversation she repeatedly stressed the role of fellowship and collaboration with other scholars. For example, during her time as an undergraduate she knew Michael Silverstein and John Haviland, other figures who helped define linguistic anthropology. She pursued her PhD in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania under the supervision of Dell Hymes; J. David Sapir, also a mentor, spurred her interest in Africa and Senegal. It was an exciting time to be at Penn, and Judy recollected feeling on the cutting edge of something. Erving Goffman and William Labov held what she affectionately called a "comedy hour," a recurring seminar in linguistic anthropology that was very widely attended. Elinor Ochs, Susan Philips, Joel Sherzer, Regna Darnell, and Candy Goodwin were among her peers and friends at Penn, and she remained in close contact with them after graduation.

Judy's social networks deeply informed her career as a professor and researcher. She started her first job in 1972 as an assistant professor at Brandeis University, where she became a full professor and served as department chair. Because linguistic anthropologists within the broader region of Massachusetts and New England were few and far between, she reached out to colleagues at institutions in the US, Australia, and other countries to find a community of scholars who shared theoretical interests. She served in the American Anthropological Association (AAA), first on the ethics committee and then, from 1989 to 1991, as the fourth president of the Society for Linguistic Anthropology (SLA), which was created in 1983. Judy mentioned working collaboratively with senior scholars and peers in establishing the SLA: "I was not alone, not at all. Dell Hymes kind of pushed it a bit. He was president elect of the AAA. There were certainly some movers and shakers, Michael Silverstein, Marianne Mithun, and Jane Hill. Jane did a lot of the work."

We were curious to learn more about the early days of the SLA and the organizational work that accompanied its formation. As the sun went down and the mosquitoes became particularly ravenous, we put on our masks and headed into the house, where we each took a seat around her dining room table. Judy carefully pulled a document out from a folder, the newsletter for the inaugural meeting of the SLA, circulated among 400 people in September 1983. We all skimmed the document with fascination in the warm light that surrounded us, momentarily distracted by Cleo, a

beautiful black cat with glowing, golden eyes, who had jumped up on the table and started to devour a piece of paper (we had all previously heard tell of this mischievous cat. It was a bit like meeting a celebrity). Perusing the newsletter we saw evidence of the personalities and senses of humor of many of the scholars that we have long admired; a reminder, again, of how institutions such as the SLA are knit together through enduring social relationships.

We learned that the SLA was launched at the 1982 AAA Annual Meeting through convening people interested in linguistic anthropology or anthropological linguistics. Judy spoke at the meeting, where she remembers making a passionate plea for the formal establishment of a society, and for the label "linguistic anthropology." She also supported the inclusion of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas (SSILA), within the AAA and in the AAA annual meeting, although the SSILA eventually transferred its meeting to that of the Linguistic Society of America (about half of the SSILA's membership remained, and remains, members of the SLA). The SLA's first objective was to increase the representation of linguistic anthropologists within the governing structure of the AAA.

A second objective of the SLA was to create a publication that would showcase linguistic anthropological scholarship. In the beginning years of the society there was much discussion about what the format and structure of such a publication would look like, with the leadership of the society finally deciding upon a flagship journal, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* (JLA), launched in 1990. The newly appointed search committee chose Benjamin G. Blount to be the first editor, and he served from 1990 to 1996. Judy, who served as the second editor from 1996 to 1999, took the journal in a new sub-discipline defining direction by publishing strong ethnographic works that focused on linguistics, including Kathryn A. Woolard's (1998) "Simultaneity and Bivalency as Strategies in Bilingualism." In 1999 she collaborated with Alessandro Duranti, the following editor, on a double, special issue devoted to his "Lexicon for the Millennium" theme, which emerged from an AAA presentation on keywords in linguistic anthropology. Judy has published a range of articles and commentaries in JLA over the years, including an exciting article that will be published in the May 2022 issue, "Revisiting Theory and Method in Language Ideology Research." This work emerged from a plenary talk that she gave virtually at the 23rd international Sociolinguistics Symposium, hosted by the University of Hong Kong in 2021.

While Judy is well known for her vital work in developing the concept of language ideologies, among a range of other important concepts, in our conversation that evening we found ourselves drawn to asking about her incorporation of historical material into her linguistic anthropological scholarship. Indeed, Judy's work throughout her career illustrates the synergistic relationship between ethnography and historiography, a connection both influenced by and influencing her work on language ideologies. Her training at both Radcliffe and Penn fostered an early interest in ethnographic and historical approaches to the study of Wolof. As a graduate student she was reading books on Senegal that dated back to the fifteenth century because she had realized that some of the systems she was studying in her ethnographic research were very old. An early project (published 1978) compared oral histories she had collected ethnographically with archival sources dealing with the same period. Also in 1978 she published a piece on variation in the archive in various sets of words in Wolof, comparing variation in nineteenth century published dictionaries with variation in present-day usage. In other historically-focused publications she conducted biographical work on some of the early Wolof linguists, and archival research at the Catholic Archdiocese in Senegal. She noted with delight how she discovered an author who wrote a lively grammar of Wolof that was full of anti-racist material. He called race prejudice "a form of moral leprosy" and his grammar was supposed to be a demonstration of how the "language was at least if not more sophisticated than French." Still intrigued by this scholar, in the future she hopes to travel to the French archives to look for his personnel file. For research on

early linguistic work in other regions of the African continent—a topic she continues to pursue—she has worked with archives from the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society, among other sources.

This brief discussion cannot possibly provide a comprehensive account of Judy's wide-ranging scholarship and institution-building contributions (for example, we could speak at length about her collaboration with Regna Darnell and Richard Handler in publishing the collected works of Edward Sapir, whose anthropological writings on language and culture have influenced generations of linguistic anthropologists). Rather, we conclude by reflecting on how her thoughtful, clear-sighted attention to the social and ideological processes underpinning knowledge production is manifest not only in the content of her work, but also her mentorship style. The collegiality and practicality Judy brought to the SLA and other organizations is apparent in her interactions with students. She consistently offers straightforward and thought-provoking advice on how they can improve their papers, grant proposals, job applications, and article manuscripts. Even if the required revision is substantial, we never leave feeling discouraged because she uses every constructive comment as a teachable moment—as if she is inviting us to join her in refining and rethinking our ideas. She teaches us to provide rich context, to think logically about the semiotic mechanisms of sociolinguistic differentiation, to situate our work socio-historically, and to reflect on our scholarly biases. Judy's calmness is legendary, and her empathetic ear makes it possible for us to discuss problems openly and end up with a clear direction on how to circumvent them and move forward. She encourages us to be the best possible version of ourselves, with many of us drawing on her model of diplomacy and public engagement to pursue our own missions to promote the theoretical frameworks and arguments of linguistic anthropology to different audiences. In sum, her careful and generous attention to the social life of scholarship is a thread uniting the various tasks of her academic life. We were pleased to be able to raise a toast to her in person last August; in this tribute we offer an indelible impression of that toast.