

English language and linguistic theory:  
A tribute to Geoff Pullum  
Opening remarks

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This celebration had its inception on November 3, 2020, when I wrote the following email to Nik Gisborne:

Are Festschrifts a thing these days? Is one being planned for Geoff?  
Would he approve of/appreciate one?

They aren't really, and one wasn't, but we decided that he might, and, so here we are. We hope that he does.

I ended up as the head of the organizing confederates. Joan Maling, having suggested that we keep it a secret from him, was chief Geoff wrangler, ensuring that he would be in Edinburgh at the right time and not otherwise occupied. She wrangled heroically until the end of June when the levees she had constructed around our selected date were in imminent danger of being overwhelmed by Geoff's schedule. And so early in July, I sent him an email revealing our scheme. His response started with a terrible pun from a ridiculous 1960s Ealing Studios comedy, "Infamy! Infamy! They've all got it in for me!" But it ends with his assenting to "all this embarrassment, kerfuffle, foofaraw, and unwarranted honour." To which I can only say that we, here, could not disagree more about the warrantedness.

Thank you, Nik, for the many suggestions and for taking charge of all the local organizing, and I know I speak for everyone in thanking the behind-the-scenes folks in PPLS who ultimately make this event and other events like it work. Thanks, also to the other organizers; Joan, Jim, and Geoff himself. Once he found out about the event, he couldn't help but jump in, insisting on the removal of one speaker from the roster, a man he's recently called a "mean, twisted, no-good scoundrel" along with the addition of John Joseph as our final speaker.

Geoff needs no introduction. (He's already written a much funnier bio than I could come up with.) Perhaps some of the other speakers do though.

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Polly Jacobson and Geoff met each other at the 1978 Linguistics Institute at the University of Illinois in Urbana, where as soon as it would rain, the sidewalks immediately turned to steam. They became good friends there and have stayed good friends since. Together they edited a book *The nature of syntactic representation*, and co-wrote a squib a decades ago on the ‘1 Advancement Exclusiveness Law’ (a proposed principle in Relational Grammar) – a squib that never saw the light of day and which, I’m told, sits in a drawer somewhere.

Mark Steedman and Geoff first met in person on the green pastures of Stanford University, at the 1987 LSA Summer Institute. They are connected by interests in low-power syntactic theory and have been colleagues for many years but have never published together.

Geoff was Chris Potts’s PhD advisor at UC Santa Cruz. They’ve collaborated on a number of projects and published an article together on Optimality Theory.

In 1988, Philip Miller edited a book in which Geoff was an author. In 1992, they worked together on a French-language paper with Arnold Zwicky, which they revised and republished in English in 1997. In 2001, they collaborated on a review of a James Rogers book. In 2014 was their paper on Exophoric VP Ellipsis. And last year they published two articles about why the so-called DP hypothesis was wrong, again, one in French and one in English. Peter Culicover and Geoff have obviously run in the same circles for many years but never collaborated as far as I am aware. Peter also wrote the *Language review* of *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*.

Nik, I’m sure you all know, had an office right across the hall from Geoff’s for many years here in Edinburgh, and they’ve collaborated extensively, including co-supervising doctoral students.

I’m Brett. I’m meeting many of you for the first time this week, and, in fact Geoff and I have only met in person a handful of times, though our emails back and forth number in the thousands, beginning with a pedantic observation of mine about something he’d written on *Language log*. Somewhat to my surprise, he responded, and so I kept emailing him, and he kept responding.

One persistent topic was when a second edition of *A student’s introduction to English grammar* would ever be available. I asked so many times that in January of 2020, just as COVID was sweeping us from the classrooms and across the globe, he broached the idea of my collaborating on it. I leapt at the opportunity, and *the book* came out at the end of 2021, at least, here in the UK. The official date is 2022, though.

John Payne and Geoff worked together for many years on the *CGEL* project, and since that came out in 2002, they’ve published a number of papers that built on the *CGEL* framework. John, by the way, was eager to participate in this celebration, but when he retired at the end of last year, he went into radio silence, and it took Kersti Börjars’s looking him up in an old-fashioned phone book and Nik’s eventually sending him a letter by post to rouse him.

Ryan Nefdt met Geoff at a 2015 conference on “Languages as Abstract Objects” run by two Postallian Platonists in Lower Saxony. They – Ryan and Geoff, not the Platonists – have since co-authored a significant update to the

entry for [Philosophy of linguistics](#) in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

John Joseph and Geoff have been colleagues for 15 years, and while they have not always seen eye to eye, they have become friends and may even have learned something from each other.

I hope we can all do so today.