

MEMORIAM

REMEMBERING BILL

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Bill was one of the great linguists of our time. It was my privilege to have had him as a good friend for over a half-century. Here I will try to recall some personal memories across the fog of distant time, as best as I can.

It was actually through Uriel Weinreich that Bill's work first came to my attention. Uriel's classic *Languages in Contact*, first published in 1953, opened a new perspective for me on how languages change. And his later discussion of *Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change*, co-authored with Bill and Marvin Herzog and published in 1968, was an authoritative and balanced statement on what language is, just when the juggernaut of transformational grammar, with its seductive bag of unfounded claims, was beginning to sweep over the field. That paper exemplified for us a precious empirical approach that was much needed for balance in the field.

The first paper by Bill that I read was published in 1963, *The Social Motivation of a Sound Change*, based on fieldwork in Martha's Vineyard. The title caught my eye because I have been pondering language change primarily from just a biological viewpoint—having to do with the physiological dynamics of articulation, perception, memory, etc., which is clearly only part of the story. Later, I got hold of the original version of Bill's *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*, which was his PhD dissertation, written under Uriel's direction, and made available in 1966.

Bill left us on December 17, 2024. With much sadness, I have collected some memories here of our friendship over several decades, to share with the readers of the *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*.