TEXT, TIME, AND CONTEXT

Studies in Linguistics and Philosophy

Volume 87

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TEXT, TIME, AND CONTEXT

Selected Papers of Carlota S. Smith

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ISBN 978-90-481-2616-3 e-ISBN 978-90-481-2617-0
DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-2617-0
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009926837

Preface

This project was begun in February 2007. We, Richard Meier and Helen Aristar-Dry, had the privilege of knowing Carlota Smith as a mentor and friend for many years. In 2006 Richard had broached the possibility of hosting a small conference in honor of Carlota's long career, but even though Carlota was an avid organizer of almost-yearly conferences on some aspect of cognitive science or semantics or pragmatics she would have none of it. Instead she wished to publish this collection of her papers. So, during a visit of Helen's to Texas, we—that is, Carlota, Helen, and Richard—sat down to plan this book. We agreed on the parameters of the volume—specifically, to focus on Carlota's work on tense, aspect, and discourse. Thus, her early work on syntax would not be represented, nor would much of her work on language acquisition. And we agreed on the basic organization of the book, and the particular papers to be included in each major section. This was important progress, but it was the only progress that we would make during the spring semester of 2007. The spring of any academic year is hectic: Richard was in his first year of being department chair, Helen had the ever-pressing duties of the Linguist List, and—most crucially—Carlota was quite ill.

Carlota had been diagnosed with cancer in June 2005. She had undergone surgery and chemotherapy and was enduring considerable pain. But through it all she had remained an active member of the Department of Linguistics. She continued to teach very successful graduate seminars on her area of research, actively advised doctoral students, and participated in all aspects of departmental governance. After she had recovered from her first round of surgery, Keith Walters—then a faculty member at UT—joined Richard to interview Carlota at her home. It was John Robertson—Carlota's husband—who suggested that we conduct this interview; he knew that interviews of longtime law school faculty had proven to be invaluable in understanding the history of UT's School of Law. Our conversation with Carlota proved to be a fascinating oral history. Hers was an important life in modern linguistics inasmuch as she was one of the very first women to work in generative linguistics. This interview places Carlota's research in a historical and biographical context that is rarely made clear in academic volumes such as this one. For that reason we publish a slightly redacted, and extensively annotated, version of that interview here.

Carlota finished out that spring semester of 2007. She spoke eagerly of her extensive travel plans for the summer—a trip to New York City to see family and friends

(and art and theater), an annual family vacation on Martha's Vineyard, a trip to Arizona for the summer institute of the Navajo Language Academy, even a trip to Japan where she had never been before. She was scheduled to teach the following semester, although Richard was not confident that she would be able to do so. The last time he spoke to Carlota was exactly a week before she died;[1] she was having lunch at a campus restaurant with Katrin Erk, an assistant professor in Linguistics. Richard had previously appointed Carlota to serve as Katrin's "mentor." The conversation between Katrin and Carlota was animated, as was the conversation with Richard and his wife Madeline when they happened to sit down at a nearby table. But Richard noted that Carlota barely ate. The following Monday, Carlota was—as usual—in her office, meeting with a doctoral student. Richard saw her there, but—because he had no particular sense of urgency—he saw no reason to interrupt their conversation to greet Carlota or to ask how she was doing. That was the last time Richard saw Carlota. She went into a steep decline later that evening, entered the hospice on Tuesday, and died on Thursday May 24. She was 73 years old and was survived by her husband John Robertson, her daughter Alison Smith, her son Joel Smith, and her grandchildren Sylvia and Ari.

A Biographical Sketch. Carlota was born in New York City on May 21, 1934. Her family was Jewish but decidedly secular. She grew up in Greenwich Village, when it was still a Bohemian neighborhood. Her father's career was an unusual one: born in New York City as Charles Phillips, he joined the Communist Party. Under the name of Manuel Gómez, he was one of the founders of the Mexican Communist Party. But Stalin's rise caused him to become disenchanted with the Party. By 1930 he was writing an investment column for the *Wall Street Journal* under the byline of Charles Shipman. Shipman would later be Carlota's maiden name. Charles Shipman's autobiography, *It Had to Be Revolution*, was published in 1993 by Cornell University Press. Carlota's mother Sylvia was an actress who was a member of the Group Theater. We are told by Carlota's longtime friend Jane Stern that Sylvia was very literate and, as an actress, very precise in her language.

Carlota received her bachelor's degree from Radcliffe College in 1955. In the late 1950's, she was married to a faculty member, David Smith, at Swarthmore College. Another faculty wife was Lila Gleitman, whose husband Henry was then a psychology professor at Swarthmore. Neither Lila nor Carlota was content to be a suburban housewife, notwithstanding the fact that both were apparently lucky enough to have a Swarthmore undergraduate named Barbara Hall (later Barbara Hall Partee) as one of their babysitters. Lila was already a graduate student in linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania and was studying with Zellig Harris, a pioneer of modern linguistic thought.

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[1] Helen's last visit with Carlota had occurred three weeks before. She had come to Austin to discuss the book. And Carlota not only invited Helen and her husband to stay at her house but also insisted on having mutual friends over for champagne and caviar. Only later did Helen realize that Carlota was already under hospice care. Those who knew Carlota will recognize in this incident not only her zest for living, but also her knack for creating an elegant occasion out of even the most daunting circumstances.

On Carlota's recounting, it was Lila who decided that Carlota would make a good assistant for Harris. So Carlota became a research assistant and then a doctoral student in the Department of Linguistics at Penn. Zellig Harris had directed Noam Chomsky's doctoral dissertation (Chomsky 1955) and would later direct Carlota's as well (Smith 1967). In 1961, Carlota spent a year away from Penn studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA, where she was one of the very first woman students to work with Chomsky. After receiving her M.A. (1964) and Ph.D. (1967) at the University of Pennsylvania, Carlota joined the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin in 1969, where she was a member of the Department of Linguistics until her death. Interestingly, her first contact with UT's faculty seems to have been with David Hakes, who was a developmental psychologist working on first language acquisition. She was initially hired as a "faculty associate" under an enormously successful NSF training grant held by Win Lehmann and Gardner Lindzey. Other faculty members in Linguistics and Psychology who came to UT under the aegis of this grant were Donald Foss, Phil Gough, Harvey Sussman, and Robert Wall.[2]

Carlota served as the chair of the department from 1981 to 1985. During this time she was active in efforts to establish a Center for Women's Studies. She was director of UT's Cognitive Science Center from 1987 to 1994. In 1991, she was named the Dallas TACA Centennial Professor in the Humanities. TACA stands for "The Auction Center for the Arts." Given Carlota's deep interests in the visual arts, this seems a very appropriate professorship for her to have held.

Carlota's Research Career. A close look at Carlota's CV reveals four important strands to her work, three of which are represented in this volume: (1) English syntax, (2) Child language development, (3) The syntax and semantics of tense and aspect, and (4) Discourse interpretation.

Carlota's earliest work was on the syntax of English. Her first publication ("A Class of Complex Modifiers in English") dates from the year she spent at MIT and appeared in the journal *Language* (1961). Carlota began that paper with the observation that adjectives can only occur postnominally with English indefinite pronouns: e.g., *Bob would like something spicy for dinner*, but not *Bob would like spicy something for dinner*. She also observed that postnominal adjective phrases can readily occur in noun phrases (NPs) with an indefinite determiner, but not in NPs with a definite determiner. So, the sentence *I bought a book yellow with age* is fine, but not *I bought your book yellow with age*. Her solution was to derive pre- and

[2]Years later Richard would first meet Carlota at another institution of American academic life to which Gardner Lindzey made fundamental contributions: the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto. In 1986, Carlota was there on sabbatical from UT, as was Peter MacNeilage, who was also then a member of UT's Linguistics Department. Richard was a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford. In the Spring Semester of 1986, Richard had had his on-campus interview for the position he now holds at UT. But because both Carlota and Peter were away from Austin, his interview with them was instead on the veranda of the Center, overlooking the Stanford campus and, in the distance, the southern reaches of San Francisco Bay. Academic life has its moments.

post-nominal adjectivals from relative clauses (which are obviously postnominal). Relative clauses were themselves derived transformationally by merging two sentences that each contained the same noun. She then proposed transformational rules of relative clause reduction and adjective preposing. Relative clause reduction was blocked if two conditions were met: the head of the relative clause was definite and the adjective occurred with a complement. The rule of adjective preposing was obligatory, but was blocked by indefinite pronouns. On this early transformational account, the sentence *She has a green hat* was derived from a sequence of two sentences: *She has a hat. The hat is green.* Transformational rules of relative clause formation, relative clause reduction ("whiz deletion"), and adjective preposing yielded the desired result.

In 1964 she published a second paper in *Language*, one that is still extensively cited. This paper further developed the model proposed in her 1961 paper. In this second paper, she noted a variety of interesting dependencies between the determiners of nouns and the kinds of relative clauses that can modify those nouns. Again she proposed a transformational account of the facts. Inasmuch as linguistics has long moved on from the early analyses of transformational grammar, the particular solutions that Carlota proposed in these papers would not be adopted now. However, her papers remain important because of their clear exposition of distributional regularities in the structure of English NPs, and their discussion of the syntax of modifiers within those NPs.

During the 1960s, Carlota developed a second strand of work in first language acquisition. The issue of how a child (or indeed any idealized learner) could acquire a first language given the linguistic input available to children was front and center in work in generative grammar (Chomsky 1959, 1965). In 1969, Carlota published, along with Elizabeth Shipley and Lila Gleitman, an influential experimental study of how children acquire English as a first language; in ensuing years she would publish several more papers on child language development. The issue in Shipley et al. (1969) was the relationship between competence and performance in the child. More specifically, they wondered about the extent to which the rather "primitive"-looking utterances of the young child reflect his/her actual linguistic competence. To examine this question, they looked at children's responses to simple commands. As it turned out, the relationship between competence and performance seemed to change across development, such that "telegraphic" speakers, but not one-word speakers, were more likely to respond appropriately to well-formed commands (i.e., the kind they would hear from their parents) than to commands whose syntax was consistent with the child's own linguistic production.

In her subsequent work on first language acquisition, Carlota was concerned with issues of linguistic complexity. In Smith (1970), she argued that the distribution of semantic content across the sentence determined children's accuracy in an elicited imitation task; specifically, sentences in which one phrase—whether an NP or a VP—dominated a disproportionate fraction of the sentence's "information-carrying elements" were likely to be difficult for children. This was a property that she referred to as "compression" in 1970, but that she subsequently termed "density" in other work examining sources of complexity in linguistic

performance (Smith 1988; Smith and van Kleeck 1986). In her acquisition work, she would also examine the acquisition of tense and aspect; it is this acquisition work that we sample here (Smith 1980 and 1993, "The Acquisition of TimeTalk: Relations Between Child and Adult Grammars" and "The Acquisition of Tense: Bootstrapping into Syntax").

Starting in the mid-1970s, Carlota embarked on what was certainly her most important line of research. In many papers—the first of which was published in 1975—and in a very important 1991 book (*The Parameter of Aspect*), she analyzed how languages encode time and how they encode the ways events and situations occur over time. How did she get into work on tense and aspect? As she explained in the interview that we publish here, this research interest was an outcome of her year in France in the early seventies. English and French are historically related in many different ways, yet have quite different temporal systems. As virtually the first lesson in schoolbook French makes clear, French present tense verbs can be translated into English either using the simple present tense (with its characteristic habitual interpretation) or using the present progressive. Thus, depending on context, the sentence *Nous parlons à Marie* can be translated either as "We speak to Mary" or "We are speaking to Mary." Unlike English, French has two past tenses, the *imparfait* and the *passé composé* (ignoring the largely antiquated *passé simple*), which differ in whether the endpoints of an event or situation are "visible." Thirdly, English—unlike French—does not have a true future tense, but instead uses the modal *will*. All these differences are ones that she would subsequently explore; for example, in Smith (1986a), reprinted here as "A Speaker-Based Approach to Aspect", Carlota compared the English and French aspectual systems. In Smith (2007), reprinted here as "Tense and Context in French", she examined expressions of futurity in French and English.

Carlota's work on the expression of time in language is notable because of its empirical foundation in careful analyses of a number of quite different languages, including not only English and French, but also Russian, Mandarin, and Navajo. Her work on Russian, which was the result of a collaboration with Gilbert Rappaport, is published as a chapter in her 1991 book. In Smith and Erbaugh (2005), reprinted here as "Temporal Interpretation in Mandarin Chinese", Carlota and her co-author Mary Erbaugh discussed the ways in which time is conveyed in Mandarin, a language that has no grammatical tense. Carlota considered the aspectual system of Navajo in a 1996 paper, "Aspectual Categories in Navajo," that we reproduce here. Through her many years of research on Navajo, she became a member of the Navajo Language Academy, a group that seeks to further the study of Navajo, to keep Navajo from becoming endangered, and to provide training in linguistic research to members of the Navajo Nation.

With the development of her two-component theory of aspect, Carlota found her niche as a graduate teacher. Her model of temporal aspect provided an excellent framework for graduate students seeking to analyze the temporal systems of an array of languages, including under-described languages that are so much the focus of research in UT's Linguistics Department. The students working with her produced insightful descriptions of the temporal systems of Korean (Ahn 1995),

ASL (Rathmann 2005), Mandarin (Yeh 1993; Ren 2008), Q'anjob'al (Mateo Toledo 2008), and Iquito (Lai, 2009).[3]

The fourth major strand in Carlota's work consisted of her analyses of discourse. At different periods, she investigated topic and focus (Smith 1971, 1986b, 1991, 1998), backgrounding and foregrounding (Smith 1995; 1999a, b), and subjectivity (Whitaker and Smith 1984; Smith 2002a, b), as well as orienting her important work in tense and aspect toward the interpretation of sentences in discourse. Indeed, throughout her career, sentence interpretation within coherent texts sparked many of her most original syntactic and semantic observations. And in her last book, it functioned to bind her other interests together: *Modes of Discourse*, published in 2003 by Cambridge University Press, drew on her previous analyses of viewpoint and situation type, discourse topic, foregrounding, and subjectivity to produce a multi-faceted characterization of five modes, or genres, of discourse.

Two of the principles labeled "key insights" in the book are that "Linguistic meaning is often due to a group of forms rather than to a single form" (p. 10) and "Grammatical terms often have two different functions: conveying information, and giving cues to text structure" (p. 11). These principles reflect her insistence on the importance of discourse context in syntactic and semantic interpretation—something that she stressed as early as 1977, when there was almost no generative work on the interaction between discourse and syntax.[4] One of her earliest articles on tense ("The Vagueness of Sentences in Isolation") emphasized the contribution of surrounding sentences to apprehension of the temporal reference of a given sentence. Many sentences, she noted, are underspecified as to temporal reference; and what appears to be a semantic property of the sentence may in fact be an artifact of discourse interpretation. Similarly, her important 1980 article "Temporal Structures in Discourse" (also in this volume) made the point that the interpretation of Reference Time and Event Time often depends on the 'capture' of one sentence by another sentence that precedes it in the discourse.[5] See Barbara Partee's introduction to Part IV for further discussion of the links between discourse and tense interpretation in Carlota's work.

Just as Carlota viewed the temporal interpretation of sentences as heavily dependent on the surrounding discourse, so she viewed the discrimination of discourse types as heavily dependent on temporality. In *Modes of Discourse* (Smith 2003),

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[3]Co-directors or—after Carlota's passing—the directors of some of these dissertations included Nora England (Lai, Mateo Toledo), Richard Meier (Rathmann), and Stephen Wechsler (Ren).

[4]The field of discourse analysis at this time was still grounded in ethnography and sociolinguistics. And, despite the work of a number of functionalists (see, for example, Givon 1975; Li and Thompson 1976; Hopper 1979; and Hopper and Thompson 1980), generative syntax had not yet integrated many insights drawn from the interpretation of connected discourse.

[5]In the 70's she most often appealed to Reichenbach's notions of Reference Time, Speech Time, and Event Time for explanation of the temporal properties of sentences in discourse. Later she formalized these properties in the framework of Discourse Representation Theory, a theory particularly congenial to her approach because of its precise explication of context.

the modes are distinguished first by the temporality of their characteristic situation types (i.e., dynamic, static, or atemporal) and secondly by the type of progression, or text advancement, that they exhibit. The modes characterized by dynamic or static situation types (Narrative, Report, and Description) form the group of "temporal modes," and their progression is either temporally or spatially based.[6] Carlota's focus on these types of progression serves as her springboard for a new treatment of background; usually considered a temporal phenomenon, background is presented in *Modes of Discourse* as any deviation from the expected mode of progression. In that book and in earlier papers (for example, her 1984 paper co-authored with Jeanne Whitaker on the French author Gustave Flaubert, "Some Significant Omissions: Ellipses in Flaubert's *Un Coeur Simple*", which we reprint here.), Carlota sought to bring the analytic tools of linguistics to the humanistic study of literature. Carlota was always an appreciative reader of fiction, alert to the textual properties of literary narrative. It was Carlota's interest in literature—rare among linguists at that time—that was one of the things that drew Helen to her when she (Helen) was a graduate student in the English Language and Linguistics program at UT Austin in the 70's. During her scholarly career, Carlota often explicated the syntactic and pragmatic principles which underlie literary effects, a topic that she returned to late in her career through the organization of several conferences.[7] Thus *Modes of Discourse* bears witness to the many topics and fields that attracted the interest of her wide-ranging intellect, at the same time as it demonstrates the coherence among her ideas.

Concluding Thoughts. As we said at the outset of this essay, Carlota was a dear friend and a valued mentor to us both. In this book we remember the fact that Carlota was an enormously broad intellect. She crossed disciplinary boundaries to link the Department of Linguistics to a range of other departments at the University of Texas, including Psychology, Philosophy, Asian Languages, French & Italian, and others. She pursued her research in the face of turmoil in her personal life in the early 70s and in the face of the cancer that marked her last years. Through the last weeks of her life, one of her greatest concerns was to build the future of the department in which she had spent her entire career. She was an engaging friend, who enjoyed food and wine and prepared memorable meals for friends and family. Her abiding love, loyalty, and respect for her husband, family, friends, and colleagues was matched

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[6]The temporal modes, Narrative, Report, and Description, are subdivided on the basis of progression type: Narrative, for example, progresses with bounded events and explicit temporal adverbials; whereas Report has temporal progression centered on Speech Time, and Description, though a temporal mode, typically has spatial progression. The atemporal modes, Information and Argument, both have metaphorical motion through the text domain.

[7]A member of the Society for Text and Discourse, Carlota organized a symposium on Subjectivity in Texts for the 2002 meeting, having previously organized workshops on text and discourse Structure at the University of Texas in October 2000 and again in March 2006. Proceedings from the last workshop on discourse can be found on-line at: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/linguistics/workshops/4DW/

only by the love, loyalty, and respect that she received in return. Until her very last day, hers was a life that was truly well-lived.

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Acknowledgments

The editors wish to acknowledge the financial assistance to this project provided by the College of Liberal Arts of The University of Texas at Austin. Those funds were drawn from the Dallas TACA Centennial Professorship in the Humanities that Carlota had held prior to her death. Robert D. King also contributed funds from his professorship.

We particularly wish to thank the assistance of Carlota's friends and family. John Robertson, Jane Stern, and Joel Smith gave us very helpful comments on the preface. It was John Robertson's idea that we interview Carlota in 2005. Brian C. Price, formerly the senior administrative associate in the Department of Linguistics, was the cameraman for that interview. Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services provided technical assistance in the preparation of the DVD of the interview.

Gina Pollard of the staff of UT's Department of Linguistics carefully retyped the manuscripts for two chapters: "The Vagueness of Sentences in Isolation" and "Temporal Structures in Discourse"; she also helped with the scanning and re-scanning of Carlota's publications. Our thanks also to Leslie J. Crooks, the departmental manager in Linguistics, for her frequent administrative assistance on this project.

We thank Mary Erbaugh and Jeanne T. Whitaker for permission to reprint the papers on which they are co-authors. Mary also proofread, and corrected, proofs for Chapter 13. Sarah Wagner and Elyssa Ann Winzeler helped us enormously in proofreading the manuscript.

Lastly, we thank the following publishers for giving us reprint rights:

Cambridge University Press:

"The Acquisition of TimeTalk: Relations Between Child and Adult Grammars" published in *Journal of Child Language*, *7* (1980), 263–278.

"Sentences in Discourse: an Analysis of an Essay by Bertrand Russell" published in *Journal of Linguistics*, *7* (1971), 213–235.

Center for Cognitive Science, The University of Texas at Austin:

"The Acquisition of Tense: Bootstrapping into Syntax", distributed as part of the 1993 Proceedings of the Conference on Early Cognition and the Transition to Language.

Chicago Linguistic Society:
"The vagueness of sentences in isolation" published in the *Proceedings of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, (1977), 568–577.

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"Accounting for subjectivity" published in B. Nevin (ed.), *The Legacy of Zellig Harris*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins (2002), 137–163.

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All of Carlota Smith's papers that we reprint here have been lightly copyedited. Across the volume, we use a common style of headings. To the extent possible, bibliographic references have been corrected and/or updated. We have also attempted to correct minor errors (e.g. obvious reference to the wrong example number) that we are confident Carlota would have wanted corrected.

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Interview with Professor Carlota S. Smith

This interview was conducted at Carlota Smith's house in Austin on July 7, 2005 by Richard P. Meier and Keith Walters (formerly at UT Austin, now on the faculty of the Department of Applied Linguistics, Portland State University). Brian Price was the cameraman. The transcript was revised, edited, and annotated by Emilie Destruel and Richard P. Meier.

A Year in France

Keith: Were you teaching English in France or linguistics?

Carlota: I was teaching linguistics.

Keith: Linguistics, I see.

Carlota: Yeah, that was a break.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Carlota: I taught there for almost two years in the seventies in Paris.[1] At that time, there were very few linguists. Richie Kayne[2] was there.

Carlota: Nicolas Ruwet[3] was around. And so they actually got me a job. Maurice Gross[4] got me a job on a – on a claim that there was no French person who could do it. And I insisted. I just did everything in French. I wouldn't speak to any French person in English.

Richard: Oh, you did all your teaching in French.

Carlota: Yes, which was probably quite mean to the students the first semester or after that. [Talking to cat. . .] He can go out. See, he'll do anything. Max, come here. No.

Keith: It's okay. Cats will never behave.

Carlota: Well, not predictably anyway.

Keith: I mean, they never do what you want them to do.

Carlota: That's why we love them.

Keith: They will never follow orders.

Carlota: Maxie, you are so bad.

Keith: They won't follow orders. That's what I should have said.

Carlota: So, yeah. And so I got to know Richie [Kayne] well that year and Nicolas and various. . . . and Maurice, of course. And I taught at Vincennes. So this was, you know, '73 or some year like that. So it was still the aftermath of the '68 bit.[5]

Keith: Right.

Carlota: So Vincennes is the middle of the woods. You took a bus to the end of the line. Then. . . No, you took the Metro to the end of the line. You took a bus into the woods.

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[1] The University of Paris VIII at Vincennes.

[2] Received his PhD from Paris VIII in 1976, now a professor at New York University.

[3] (1933–2001). Rouwet taught at Paris VIII. Much of his early influence came through his book 'Introduction a la grammaire générative' in 1967.

[4] (1934–2001). Founder of the Laboratoire d'Automatique Documentaire en Linguistique at the University of Paris VII and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

[5] In May 1968, a series of protests began with student strikes at universities in Paris, following confrontations with university administrators and the police. The De Gaulle government's attempts to quash these strikes resulted in inflamed battles and protests, finally causing the collapse of the government.

Richard: So it was kind of wrecked, wasn't it, at the time, the campus?

Carlota: Oh, it was amazing. I never understood the value of money before that period, not in education. I mean, there was no money – like, we had no offices.

Keith: I don't think French professors have offices even now, do they?

Carlota: Yeah. I mean, I was lucky, because Maurice Gross had one of the few – he had a CNRS lab.[6] He had the only linguistics library, actually, in Paris. I had an office there. So once a week, I would just take the metro and then the bus out to Vincennes and you would actually. . . Well, there were blackboards. You would bring chalk from the lab. And then just before class, I would go into the ladies room and get a wet paper towel and bring it in for an eraser, because of course there was no eraser. There actually wasn't a lot of paper. Books were stolen. But when were you there?

Keith: No, no. This is just very much like the situation I found in Tunisia.

Carlota: Yes, I found it similar in Tunisia.

Keith: And, you know, certainly, because traditionally, and of course then all the colonies got this, there's the *responsable des classes*[7] in high schools, and what his or her job is, is to bring an eraser and chalk.

Carlota: Oh, they didn't have that in Paris.

[All laugh.]

Keith: With the university, I was thinking, maybe France had given this up or maybe by that time it just didn't happen at the university.

Carlota: However they figured it out.

Keith: And then they had to bring the book called *The cahier des classes,*[8] in which you noted down what you'd had taught for the lessons, so that when the *inspecteur* or *inspectrice* came, he or she could verify that you were indeed following the program.

Carlota: You wrote down what you were supposed to do.

Keith: Exactly.

Carlota: The other thing about Vincennes was it was an old army barracks. And in the hallways, they were selling stolen books, food, you know, stolen items, and you name it. So it was a zoo. So only the really serious people would learn anything. And the ones who were really serious figured out you had to get on at Maurice's lab [laughs] and read the linguistic books there. [laughing] It was a

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[6] See footnote 4.

[7] The person in charge of bringing chalk, etc. to the class.

[8] The class book.

very strange experience in some ways. But I did end up speaking pretty good French. And the first year, my kids went to boarding school, because I knew they'd never – I knew Paris well enough to know that if they were with me, they'd never learn French, because you don't get invited to kids' houses and stuff.

Keith: Oh, right.

Carlota: So they went to this boarding school. Then the second year, they were with me in Paris. . .and went to a lycée.

Richard: And the boarding school was in French the first year? Or was it. . .?

Carlota: Oh, yes.

Richard: Yeah, it was entirely in French.

Carlota: It happened that a friend of mine, a French friend, his father was one of the founders of the school. . .he fixed me up, he said that. . .

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Carlota: So when we left, French people thought they were French.

Keith: Right, of course.

Carlota: They were just the right age.

Keith: Kids, exactly, yeah.

Carlota: They were ten to twelve, some of that time.

Keith: That's great.

Richard: So that kind of makes sense of how you got involved in French.

Carlota: That's right.

Chinese, Navajo and Russian

Richard: But how did you decide to work on Chinese and Navajo along the way too?

Carlota: Oh, well, Chinese. I'd always sort of liked Chinese, because of Chinese restaurants when I was a little girl in New York. My father was very interested in things Chinese and we went down to Chinatown about once a month and had dim sum and wandered around Chinatown. Everyone in the restaurant knew us. The men used to make little animals for me out of drop dip dough that you make dim sum with. We used to go in the kitchen. So, I just had a very long association and a sort of pleasant association. And, you know, it's different from English, right? And the Navajo was more fortuitous. I was looking for a language that was not Indo-European and that was different from Chinese. I guess Kluwer, the publisher, loved, you know, [unintelligible], adored American

Indian languages. And I had read a lot about Hopi for some reason, you know, Whorf's language. Didn't want to work on Hopi. I don't even remember. It was just. . . I mean, I was looking for an American Indian language.

Richard: You're saying that Kluwer actually suggested it?

Carlota: Well, the editor.

Richard: The editor in part suggested it?

Carlota: Yeah. I mean, they. . . Well, I suggested it and they leapt on it.

Richard: Oh, I see. So while you're – this is while you were doing your book on aspect.[9]

Carlota: Yeah, that's right. Well, I had to do Russian, because you can't be serious about aspect unless you do Russian.

Richard: Right, Right.

Carlota: Fortunately, I got Gil [Rappoport] to work with me. So that's the only chapter that people worked with me on.

Keith: Right. Because you actually studied Chinese here.

Carlota: Yes, I did. I'd already – I'd audited a lot of Chinese.

Keith: I remember Jocelyn Liu[10] talking about it.

Carlota: Yes, that's right. Exactly. Then I got Jeannette Faurot who was then in the department too.[11]

Keith: Yes, right.

Carlota: She was wonderful. I bombarded her with questions. I'm quite bad about that. I almost lost a friend when I was bombarding somebody else about Navajo. I just constantly asked questions and gave them things and said, "What about this?" She was very nice. [laughs] And somebody else. And so I was just. . . I think I heard Navajo was mysterious and maybe I knew that there was pretty good documentation of Navajo, because there are wonderful dictionaries.

Richard: Uh-huh. Right.

Carlota: And I really couldn't have done it without the dictionaries.

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[9] *The Parameter of Aspect*. (1991). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

[10] Former doctoral student, Department of Linguistics, UT Austin. Ph.D. 1987.

[11] PhD from UCBerkeley in 1972. Professor Emeritus Center for Asian Studies and Department of Asian Studies at UT Austin.

Getting into Linguistics

Carlota: So I'm going to answer your question about getting into linguistics and stuff. Which is sort of a good story, I think, showing the difference between now and then also. So as an undergraduate for some mysterious reason I took a course with [Roman] Jakobson. We read *The Raven* in 15 languages or something. I don't think I learned anything, [laughs], but I did have exposure to Jakobson. And then I was a faculty wife at Swarthmore[12] and I had a young daughter. I really couldn't stand doing nothing, so I was looking for a job. So I looked in publishing, which I thought might be something I would end up doing. I had always thought that. But, you know, Philadelphia is not full of publishing jobs and. . . oh, you asked about feminism, and so in a couple of places they would say, "Why yes, we do have a woman, but she's – our woman is on leave right now, you know, maternity leave, and then she'll come back, so we don't need another one, right?" [all laugh] That was the inference. So I sort of couldn't find a job, so I was just trumpeting it.

Keith: This is in the publishing industry?

Carlota: Right. So I was telling. . . And Swarthmore is a small college. So anyway, in short, so Lila Gleitman,[13] who was a faculty wife at the time, Henry Gleitman was at Swarthmore, one day she said. . . And I didn't know her very well, but I'd seen her, you know, and talked to her a certain amount. We liked each other. She said, "You know, I think you might like doing what I do." Maybe this was May of some year or other. And I said, "Oh, you know, tell me more." She told me a little bit. And, you know, a week later or something, she marched me down to Penn,[14] introduced me to Zellig Harris,[15] and I was hired for the summer to be a research assistant. And my job, which I was perfectly capable of doing was to categorize English verbs for Harris's research project, which was in principle on mechanical translation. This is whatever we are – we're in '59 or '60 now. So these people had been doing this for quite some time – [laughs] – this project. So I knew nothing about linguistics, and I loved it! See now, Vendler[16] was on that project. So we used to sit around. . .

Richard: Vendler was on the project too?

Carlota: Yeah. There were all sorts of people.

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[12] College in Swarthmore, PA.

[13] PhD from University of Pennsylvania in 1967. Now emeritus professor of psychology, University of Pennsylvania.

[14] University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

[15] (1909–1992). PhD from UPenn in 1934. Began teaching at UPenn in 1931. Founded the Linguistics department there in 1946.

[16] (1921–2004). PhD from Harvard in 1959. Founding member of the philosophy department at the University of Calgary.

Richard: What was he at that time? He was a student?

Carlota: He was a research associate or something. I don't know exactly what his job was. He must have been sort of like me. I don't think he – he wasn't teaching. Maybe he was sort of. . . He must have been on leave. I don't think he was teaching philosophy. He was a philosopher, a former Jesuit priest. He was married to Helen at that time, Helen Vendler, because I got to know her then. So we would sit around at lunch and say things like, "Oh, I saw the funniest verb. I found the funniest verb this morning." And everybody would say, "Really?" [laughs] And you would tell them you'd found this verb, like *behave*, you know, where you have to have the reflexive afterwards and it has to agree. So I loved it! So at the end of the summer, I decided to go to graduate school. It couldn't have been simpler and my whole graduate school. . .. See the point I wanted to make is that there was money. Harris had money. So he could just hire these people as assistants on a long-shot and if it didn't work out. . .

Richard: On the recommendation of another graduate student.

Carlota: No, she was a graduate student.

Richard: She was.

Carlota: Lila was a graduate student.

Richard: Yeah, but just on the recommendation.

Carlota: Exactly.

Richard: Lila kind of walks in and says. . .

Carlota: And Lila didn't know me that well. I mean, she knew me a little.

Richard: Yeah.

Carlota: We'd had some good conversations, you know. And exactly, just out of the blue.

Keith: And this was federal money?

Carlota: This was federal money.

Keith: To support this translation project, that's what I assumed. . .

Carlota: This is NSF money.[17]

Keith: Yes.

Carlota: That's the point I wanted to make. Okay. Both of my interesting career things have to do with that. That NSF money comes around. My whole graduate school was paid for by – I was a research assistant the whole time.

[17] U.S. National Science Foundation.

Richard: By Harris's grant the whole time?

Carlota: On Harris's grant the whole time.

Richard: So you never taught while you were in graduate school?

Carlota: No.

Keith: Can you talk a little bit about what Penn was like at that time and what it was like to work with Harris and what was going on in Linguistics at that time? Because as Richard's question pointed out, some pretty amazing people were there then.

Richard: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And some pretty amazing things happened.

Carlota: Exactly.

Keith: In terms of consequences for the history of the discipline.

Carlota: Exactly. And P.S. or parenthesis, that's why we really have to talk to Win [Lehmann],[18] because he was prescient. I mean, he was able to see. He hired people for the Linguistics Department [at UT] . . .. It was just a few years later. Okay. So, while Haj [Ross][19] was there [at Penn] some of the time, we got to be very good friends. I guess he is probably the most well-known person. Well, okay. Harris was an extraordinary presence. He was a wonderful teacher. He, in fact, wasn't interested in my work and I never worked closely with him. So, everything I learned from him I learned as a student or as a research assistant, because he would give me papers to write and I would write research. Little research jobs to do, and I would do them. He was totally intense and he rarely talked about the competing, the beginning of competing theory. So he was teaching us his version of transformational grammar, which was of course what Chomsky learned with him and then changed. So Harris, the main thing – well, not the main thing. Harris was a very insightful person, who had been brooding about this stuff for years. So every time we came up with something, he knew already what it was. I remember he once had me do a little paper on – I don't know what to call them – modifiers, I guess, something like this. I eventually noticed *rather*. And he was reading this and said, "Well, where is it?" Then he found it. . . "Oh, I thought of it!" But he knew that it was supposed to be there. [laughs] He was just. . . He had tremendous knowledge. And he was really interested in. . . His way of training was sort of modeling. You know, he didn't ask questions. So none of us learned to teach. [all laugh] None of the teachers were teachers in the current sense of the word, nothing remotely Socratic ever happened, you know. [laughter] Or even where teachers sort of talk about how

[18] Winfred P. Lehmann (1916–2007). PhD in Germanic Linguistics from the University of Wisconsin. Joined UT Austin in 1949 as an Associate Professor in Germanic Linguistics.

[19] PhD in 1967. Was a student of Zellig Harris at UPenn and of Chomsky at MIT. Now at the University of North Texas.

they got to things. No, it wasn't like that. It was really modeling and demonstrating, but it was wonderful. I mean, you just got a tremendous sense of excitement about the enterprise. And also, although he didn't teach us about other theories, he didn't – he wasn't ideological about his theory. He didn't sort of warn us against them or trash them in any way. He just wasn't interested, you know. [laughs] So all we did was his stuff and I guess you could say that was a big flaw in the program. So there was a tremendous sense of intensity, and this – and Lila of course was there, and this gallant little band working. I guess that was another sense. Well, Henry Hoenigswald[20] was a wonderful teacher. He was a historical linguist who was very traditional. So it was sort of an ecumenical group, come to think of it. Somebody named Southworth,[21] who did morphology. Henry Heesch did logic and stuff. He was a holdover traditional European and did things that way. Zeno [Vendler] didn't teach. I don't think he taught in the Philosophy Department. He might have. I think I would have known, because we were kind of good friends.

Richard: Who were the other students besides Lila?

Carlota: Well, I'm just trying to think. There was somebody named Jim whose last. . . Oh, well, Bill Watt, William Watt, who is still a friend. [. . .] He was at Irvine[22] for a long time. He's now retired. But he's kind of stopped doing linguistics and started doing semiotics and stuff long ago. Liz Shipley,[23] who Lila and I worked with, was around, she was in Psychology. And Henry, of course, was in Psychology. Oh, Myrna Gopnik[24] –

Richard: Oh, of course.

Carlota: – was around. She was a friend of mine. So, I mean, it was a small group, a very small group.

Richard: But choice.

Carlota: I can't think of anyone else. Yeah, self-chosen or randomly chosen or something.

Going to MIT

Carlota: So then one day, I can't remember the order in which these things occurred. Chomsky came to give a talk one day. And the other day, there was this little manuscript on Harris's desk, which I for some reason picked up and

[20](1915–2003).

[21]Professor Emeritus of South Asian Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania.

[22]University of California at Irvine.

[23]PhD in 1961 from UPenn in Psychology.

[24]Now Professor of Linguistics at McGill.

asked if I could borrow it. It was *Syntactic Structures.*[25] I was just absolutely thrilled by *Syntactic Structures*. I mean, it was just – I loved it, and it was a whole different way of thinking, and it completely blew everything else out of my mind, in terms of how to approach linguistics; although, I really didn't have that formal background, but I was able to understand enough and I had some of it. And as I said, I don't remember which order Chomsky talked about his work and I read this. No idea. But then, another random event, my then husband, David Smith, wanted to spend the year in Cambridge the following year. So Harris wrote Noam and said, you know, "This person is coming." So I spent the second year of graduate school at MIT. And that changed and determined everything I did in linguistics. MIT was teeny. [Edward] Klima – Ed Klima was there.[26] Lees would come from time to time, you know, from the Midwest. He was at Illinois and sort of commune [laughs] and give a talk or something.[27] Maybe he was even there for part of the time. And Haj. I guess maybe – yeah, I think Haj wasn't there when I was there. Ted Lightner was there.[28] Toward the end, Paul Postal[29] started hanging around a lot. He wasn't officially there yet. So it was really just beginning. But we all understood that this was it.

Richard: Mm-hmm.

Carlota: I think maybe [George] Lakoff[30] would pop in from time to time, too, because he was in Indiana doing his dissertation work. So we felt, I mean. . . Chomsky always assumed this stance of beleaguered, but it was just that. I mean, you know, it was already. . . I mean, I guess he'd already published not only *Syntactic Structures*, but the *Review of Skinner*.[31]

Keith: Right. Right.

Carlota: And, you know, everybody understood that this was it. This was just the most exciting thing that had happened in a long time.

Keith: It's long seemed to me for people outside the discipline of linguistics it was the *Review of Skinner* that really was the important intellectual milestone.

Richard: Oh, I think that's true for people in psychology.

Keith: And even in many other disciplines, I think, it's just sort of. . .

Carlota: Yeah, it reverberated.

Keith: Exactly. Just entire edifices just crumbled.

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[25] First published in 1957 (Mouton).

[26] (1931–2008). Faculty member, MIT, 1959–1967.

[27] Lees, Robert B. (1922–1996). Professor of Linguistics at University of Illinois and later at Tel Aviv.

[28] Ph.D. 1965, MIT.

[29] PhD in 1963 from Yale. Now professor at NYU.

[30] PhD in 1966 from Indiana University. Now professor at UC Berkeley.

[31] Review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*. *Language*, *35* (1959), 26–58.

Carlota: They did. And, you know, it's so interesting, when I taught Plan II, *Cognitive Science Approach to Linguistics*, I'd given that article to the students. Some like it and some don't. It's dated.

Keith: Right, yes.

Carlota: But it's still terrific.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Carlota: I mean, to me, anyway. And some of them see it. For some of them, it's sort of old news. It's like I've just been rereading *Augie March*. Well, I have very mixed feelings. [laughs] Which I adored when I was 17. [laughs] Some of it's old news and some of it's just totally compelling still.

Keith: Yes.

Carlota: So that was a very exciting year for me. And I didn't understand these things at all, but I wrote a paper, which Chomsky sent to *Language*. That was my first publication.[32]

Richard: Chomsky sent it to *Language*?

Carlota: So, of course, they published it.

Richard: What does that mean that Chomsky sent it to *Language*?

Carlota: Well, you guess. It meant they published it. That's what it meant. [laughs]

Richard: No, no, no, no. I mean, you mean he just sent it and then didn't talk to you about it?

Carlota: Well, no, no. No, no, no. We had worked on it, everybody. . . I mean, it was. . .. Okay, I see. So Chomsky was a lecturer. We all went to everything. Umm, we all went to everything. So if there was a talk. . .. And that still bothers me about this department. Everybody doesn't come to the colloquium. Somebody gave a colloquium, we all went – everybody.

Richard: Mm-hmm.

Carlota: Oh, Morris Halle,[33] of course, was there. How could I forget Morris? Well, because I wasn't. . .[laughs, unintelligible]

Richard: And was Jakobson present a lot?

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[32] 'A class of complex modifiers in English.' *Language*, *37* (1961), 342–365.

[33] Professor at MIT since 1951, now emeritus.

Carlota: No. He was at Harvard and he was not present. Roger Brown[34] was there, and I was sent by Chomsky to be the deputy from this group to Roger Brown's seminar.

Richard: Oh, that's funny. [laughs]

Carlota: And I acted as such, and then when I got back to Penn and started working with Lila, and Liz Shipley on acquisition,[35] so that sort of worked out.

Richard: So Chomsky was kind of sending emissaries to William James Hall or whatever to contact.

Carlota: Yes, that's right. No, no. Well, Brown, I think he had. . . I don't remember. it seems to me he had a seminar at MIT. I think I'd remember. I'm not sure. Because I was an undergraduate in Cambridge, and it's all very familiar to me, so I really don't remember if I went over, because I was auditing Quine's[36] class that year at Harvard, so I went over a lot, you know, to Harvard anyway, so I really don't remember. I think it was at MIT.

Richard: So Chomsky sent your paper to. . .

Carlota: Anyway, so the point is the apprenticeship that I really had in linguistics, besides me listening to Harris was this, I would write, draft this paper, and they would all read it: Morris, Ed Klima, Chomsky, Lees, whoever else, you know, they wandered in. And then they would tear it to pieces and I would write it again. Then they would all read it again. This happened several times. At the end, it wasn't so bad. [laughs] And he probably told me he was sending it, but I didn't understand what that meant. So I won't say *entre-nous* in this setting, but really, the second paper[37] I published in *Language* I did to show myself I could do it without him.

Richard: Mm-hmm.

Carlota: When I got back to Penn. [laughs] Because obviously, you can't live on it. And by then, I understood.

Keith: The system.

Carlota: What it meant.

Richard: What you are also saying is that the first – he wasn't beleaguered even in 1961 or whenever you sent that first paper.

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[34](1925–1997). PhD in Psychology from the University of Michigan 1952. For most of his career he was on the faculty of the Department of Psychology at Harvard, except 1957–1962 when he was on the faculty of MIT.

[35]'A study in the acquisition of language: Free responses to commands.' *Language*, *45* (1969), 322–343.

[36](1908–2000). From 1930 to 2000, Quine was professor at Harvard in Philosophy.

[37]'Determiners and relative clauses in a generative grammar of English.' *Language 40* (1964), 37–52.