

## PRESENTATION

This special issue of D.E.L.T.A. is devoted to the visit to Brazil by Prof. Noam Chomsky of the M.I.T. who is one of the most controversial and esteemed scholars in the field of the human sciences and whose work has had an immense impact on other areas of knowledge such as biology, computational science, psychology, neurology, and philosophy. Also widely known is his work in the field of political science, where he has targeted any and every form of oppression and authoritarianism. Chomsky's visit to Brazil covered both these areas, though the present issue presents only the transcriptions of those of his talks that addressed issues in linguistics.

It is also gratifying to present this issue of the journal as a volume produced in the best spirit of democracy and with enduring results. It contains the written versions of talks given at Rio/Belém and São Paulo, together with the questions and answers that followed these talks, as well as a *tête-à-tête* conceded at Maceió. The publication of this special number was possible thanks to the cooperative spirit of the groups that took care of the arrangements each of these cities during Chomsky's sojourn in Brazil between November 17th and December 4th, 1996.

Each of the texts and answers to questions contributes to the comprehension of the essential characteristics of the system of language, as well as the other neighbouring mental system and also how these various systems happen to be interconnected and finally how all these questions have been historically handled. Each text opens a window on how Chomsky evaluates the different theoretical perspectives, evidencing once again his sharply critical acumen and characteristic internal coherence. Some of the answers to questions may be considered anthological and we leave it to the readers to make their own calm and considered judgments at their own pace and pleasure. We do wish to register, though, that the text of the talks given at Rio/Belém were put to test by Miriam Lemle, with highly satisfactory results, as part of an introductory course in generative grammar, and this clearly points to its possible use in post-graduates programmes elsewhere.

The talk given at São Paulo contains a fascinating personal account of recent history of linguistics, submitted as it was to the pressures of dominant intellectual tendencies, often marked by academic reactions that can by no means be attributed to the sincere theoretical convictions of those who claim to subscribe to them, but rather to pressures of an occult and non-descript nature. It makes us wonder to what extent such rifts may not turn out to be a familiar pattern in other contexts and moments.

In the question-answer sessions at Maceió, the interviewers were successful in drawing forth an avalanche of theoretical positionings - at once radical, vibrant, clear and sharp - of the sort that one can ill afford to read without having to contain first the intense wish to participate in the ongoing discussion. In the case of some of the answers, the two major interests of Chomsky are reflected in the twin questions of doing scientific

research and training future scientists, for, from his point of view, to do scientific research is to question the authorities and to learn to doubt established knowledge. What is even more intriguing in his texts and in his talks is the will to question his own assumptions, and his claims to the effect that they may well be wrong outright. It is in this posture that one may detect the roots of Chomsky's characteristic modesty when it comes to sharing with his colleagues and students not just the questions and the answers to them, but also the enormous success of the generative theory, upon whose premisses are currently being described languages from all over the world, including Brazilian Portuguese as well as many native Brazilian Indian languages. No other theory today can boast such a wealth of languages described by means of the same metalanguage.

The readers of the volume, irrespective of whether they work under the generative paradigm, will certainly learn a lot about how to do science in general and in our field in particular. We are confident that this special issue of D.E.L.T.A. will find its way to many undergraduate and post-graduate classrooms and stir a lot of fruitful discussion at all levels of teaching and research in linguistics.

The publication of this issue was made possible thanks to the combined effort of the ABRALIN (Brazilian Association of Linguistics) and D.E.L.T.A., as well as all those who hosted Prof. Chomsky in the different parts of the country. We also wish to thank the CNPq (The National Council for Research and Development) and other local funding agencies that financed Chomsky's visit and all those who, armed with enthusiasm and goodwill, rolled up their sleeves and contributed to the collective effort that resulted in those wonderful moments (as well as this joint publication of the texts that appear in this volume) that inspired so many and will certainly inspire many more who happen to lay their hands on the present number.

It remains to thank once again, and, no doubt, on top of everything else, the great Teacher who ended up becoming a Pal for having taken these few days off his busy schedule, for having had the enormous patience along the protracted negotiations before finally settling on the dense programme of activities, and finally, his generous permission to publish the texts in this special issue.

Enjoy your journey.

Pelos anfitriões: Miriam Lemle  
Pela Abralín: Maria Denilda Moura  
Pela D.E.L.T.A.: Leila Barbara