

From Leslie to Me

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I would never have become *this* interested in language if it had not been for Leslie.

Perhaps this all goes back to the idea of notebook data. In the mid-1990s, Leslie wrote a paper entitled *Notebook data on power and the power of notebook data* (Beebe, 1994), based on her experience as a juror on a high-profile case involving Donald Trump's ex-wife. She turned her jury duty into a research project! Yes, Leslie Beebe is a different kind of a linguist—certainly not one trapped in an ivory tower. She taught me to see language as it is, not what it should be. “Leslie’s Notebook” still follows me around as I record language as lived by real people in real life, and I bring these notes into the classroom. I learned that an example, like a picture, is worth a thousand words, and a real example is worth a million. I’m a little more tuned-in, a little more relevant, and a little more interesting as a teacher because of Leslie.

Leslie also has a superb gift for clarity. With very little tolerance for any intellectual mumbo jumbo, she pursues and embodies clarity in her teaching, writing, and advising. I remember sitting in her seminar as a beginning doctoral student. The air was filled with ideas, references, and technicalities. It was a very foggy experience for a newcomer, but from time to time, the fog just lifts. Whatever gets tackled by Leslie becomes instantly clear—crystal clear. Watching her work with my senior classmates was probably one of the best learning experiences of my academic career. I no longer remember the details of those exchanges. What lingers is the relentless insistence on clarity. I’m a little braver as an academic because of Leslie.

And yes, a little ruder, too. Perhaps because of her impatience with pretense, Leslie is not afraid to venture into uncharted territories. When the field of pragmatics was dominated by linguistic politeness, she argued for rudeness as an important component of communicative competence. Yes, rudeness. Her groundbreaking work on rudeness remains a singular contribution to our field to this day. I still remember my speedy acquisition of this taboo competence and the stunned look on the face of my then-boyfriend (now husband) who up until then had thought he was dating a nice Chinese girl. Thanks to Leslie, I am not a language snob.

And of course, there are those things that are quintessentially Leslie Beebe that I am simply too fossilized to acquire: she has the energy of a teenager, she can spot a typo in what looks to me like a final, final version of any paper, and she can enthrall an audience—be it a small seminar or a large stadium. She is an Indian art connoisseur, a gifted photographer, and a world-class bird watcher. The list goes on.

So, speaking as a true minimalist, here’s to audacity, intellect, zestfulness, and above all, to a mentor who made linguistics interesting for me!

REFERENCES

- Beebe, L. (1994, March). *Notebook data on power and the power of notebook data*. Paper presented at the annual conference for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Baltimore, MD.

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