

Remembering Tom Dutton

A tribute by Karl Franklin (SIL)

Tom was an early PNG friend of ours—Joice and I taught him linguistics at the government linguistics course in Goroka in 1960 and he spent the following Christmas with us. Tom rightly claimed that we got him started in linguistics.

From that time on, Tom and I stayed in touch and were good friends. We both studied at ANU in Canberra doing our PhDs in linguistics, and we lived side by side and even shared an office for a time. We loved to talk, argue, and discuss, mainly linguistics, but any topic was fair game. We even played a logic game during noon recesses, much to the awe and wonderment of some of our colleagues.

Tom and I were both writing grammars of the languages we were studying—Koiari and Kewa—but Tom was using the transformational grammar model and I was using tagmemics, a now forgotten and forlorn brand of linguistics. We were both also interested in comparative linguistics and Tom wrote several articles in that genre. For instance, he wrote a massive chapter of 122 pages for the volume on the Gulf Province that I edited. Although most comparative linguists disregarded “cultural” items due to concerns about borrowing, Tom carefully compared food and foodstuffs in languages throughout the country.

Prior to that time, Tom had been awarded a post-doctoral fellowship to study at MIT, then housing probably the most prestigious linguistics department in the world.

For several years Tom was the foundation professor of linguistics at the University of Papua New Guinea, so we saw each other often, particularly at linguistics conferences. Later Tom was a valued member of the linguistics department at ANU, where he edited volumes for Pacific Linguistics and wrote many books and articles. He was a specialist in Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu and promoted their use through practical handbooks and courses.

In 2001 Pacific Linguistics published a Festschrift in honor of Tom. It was called *The Boy from Bundaberg: Studies in Melanesian Linguistics in Honour of Tom Dutton* and was edited by Andrew Pawley, Malcolm Ross and Darrell Tryon. As the editors noted, in 1997, while “still at the height of his powers, Tom took us all by surprise and decided to take early retirement.”

His bibliography is long, with around 125 entries as author, reviewer, and editor. Tom went on in retirement to sheep-farming, learning shearing, wool classing, fencing and sheepdog training. He was a successful farmer and with his personality, stamina and high energy level, continued working until his mid-80s, when he only slowed down because of a stroke.

He died on December 22nd at the age of 87. He will be missed by all of his friends and colleagues. His lovely wife Corinne continues to live in Yass, near Canberra.