



Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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William Bright and his Work

Welcome to class. Today we are going to talk about an eminent sociolinguist William Bright and his work, his contribution to shaping the discipline of sociolinguistics. William Bright is known for his groundbreaking work in Native American languages and South Asian languages.

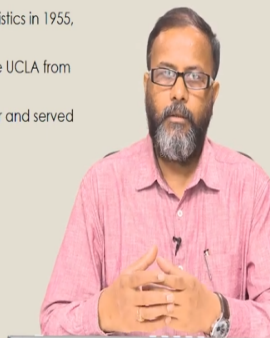
He was an American linguist and he is credited with creating enormous reference material books and monograph dictionaries for Native American languages, specifically languages in California. So today, we will talk about William Bright and his work.

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William Bright


- 13 August 1928 - 15 October 2006
- William Bright is an American descriptive linguist and toponymist who specialized in Native American and South Asian languages.
- Bright got his bachelor's degree in 1949 and PhD in linguistics in 1955, from the University of California, Berkeley.
- He was a professor of linguistics and anthropology at the UCLA from 1959 to 1988.
- Later, he moved to the University of Colorado at Boulder and served there until his death.



William Bright was born on 13th August 1928 and he died on 15th October 2006. He is an American linguist, a descriptive linguist and a toponymist who is specialized in Native American languages and South Asian Languages with his specific reference to Dravidian languages and a language called Lushai, which is Mizo in Mizoram, India.

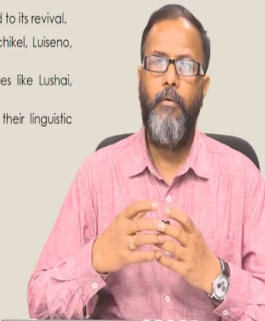
Bright got his bachelor's degree in 1949 and his PhD in Linguistics in 1955 from the University of California, Berkeley. He was appointed as a Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1959 to 1988, and later on he moved to the University of Colorado and served there until his death.

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Academic Journey

- Bright was an authority on the native languages and cultures of California.
- He is known for his work on Karuk, a Native American language from north-western California.
- He conducted his study of the language under the project of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages.
- He was honoured with an honorary membership of the Karuk tribe and became the first outsider to be so.
- Bright's work turned instrumental in documenting and preserving Karuk language which led to its revival.
- Bright continued his research on the Native American languages such as Nahuati, Kagchikel, Luiseno, Ute, Wishram, and Yurok.
- He worked on other South Asian languages with specific reference to Indian languages like Lushai, Kannada, Tamil and Tulu.
- His toponymic contributions to knowledge about Native American place-names and their linguistic importance for tribes and California bands is of great importance.



If we look at the illustrious journey, the wonderful journey of William Bright, as a scholar, as an author, as a field worker and as a descriptive linguist, it is pioneering and inspiring. Bright was an authority on the native languages and cultures of California. He is known for his work on Karuk, a Native American language from Northwestern California.

He conducted his study of the language under the project the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages. He was honoured with an honorary membership of the Karuk tribe and became the first outsider to do so. And this recognition was an acknowledgement of his immense work and his instrumentality in revitalizing and preserving, documenting Karuk language.

Bright's work turned instrumental in documenting and preserving Karuk language, which led to its revival. He continued his research on the Native American Languages such as Nahuati, Kagchikel, Luiseno, Ute, Wishram and Yurok. He worked on other South Asian languages with specific reference to Dravidian languages like Kannada, Tamil and Tulu.

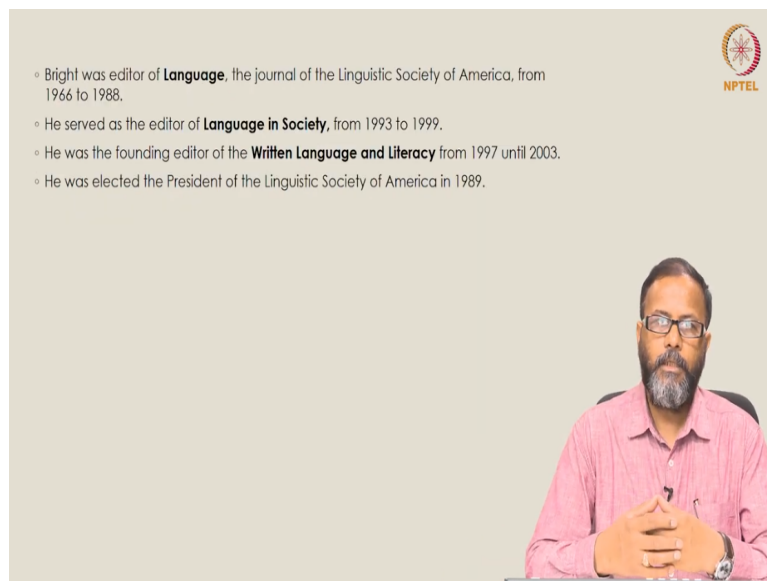
He also worked on Lushai, a language in one of the North Eastern states of India called Mizoram. Lushai is the name of the language spoken by a dominant clan Dhulain and it is known as a generic name called Mizo, name of the language. Incidentally, I also happen to work on Mizo.

So William Bright worked on the Native American languages in and around California on the language, culture and society of these tribes. He also extended his work to South Asian

languages among which Dravidian languages like Tamil, Kannada and Tulu and one Tibeto-Burman language in India that is called Lushai; whose generic name is Mizo.

His toponymic works and contributions to knowledge about Native place names and their linguistic importance for tribes in California bands is of great importance. So, he has been basically a field worker, working in the field with community and a very great descriptive linguist and anthropologist in that right.

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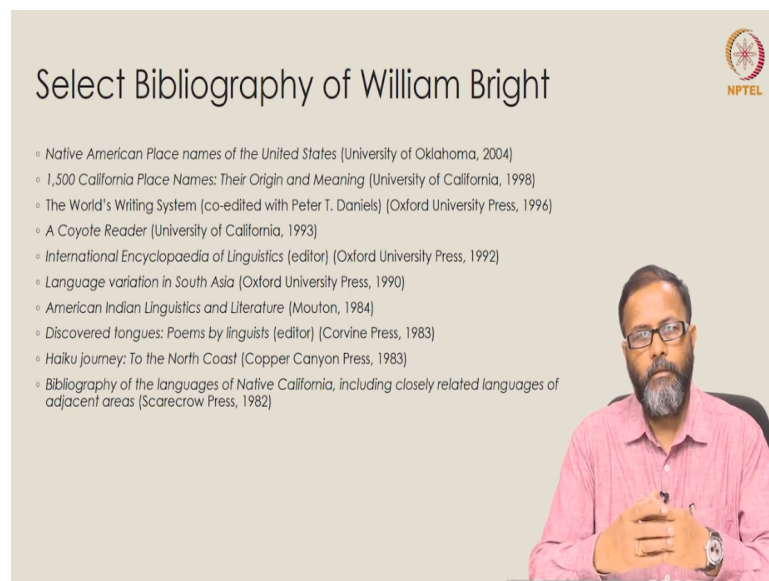
The slide contains a list of achievements on the left and a video inset of a man speaking on the right. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

- Bright was editor of **Language**, the journal of the Linguistic Society of America, from 1966 to 1988.
- He served as the editor of **Language in Society**, from 1993 to 1999.
- He was the founding editor of the **Written Language and Literacy** from 1997 until 2003.
- He was elected the President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1989.

He was an editor of *Language*, the journal of the Linguistic Society of America from 1966 to 1988; one of the longest serving editors of the journal, which is one of the prestigious journals of the world. He served as the editor of *Language in Society*, from 1993 to 1999. He was the founding editor of the journal *Written Language and Literacy* from 1997 to 2003.

And he was elected the President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1989. And if you look at the work, the kind of work, research and publications he carried out during his career. He is very descriptive in nature and apart from Karuk language he has worked on a number of other Native American Languages in California and around California. He is a prolific writer, an author, researcher and a wonderfully gifted teacher.

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The slide features a title 'Select Bibliography of William Bright' at the top left. To the right is the NPTEL logo. Below the title is a list of 10 publications, each preceded by a small circle. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a pink shirt, speaking with his hands clasped.


- *Native American Place names of the United States* (University of Oklahoma, 2004)
- *1,500 California Place Names: Their Origin and Meaning* (University of California, 1998)
- *The World's Writing System* (co-edited with Peter T. Daniels) (Oxford University Press, 1996)
- *A Coyote Reader* (University of California, 1993)
- *International Encyclopaedia of Linguistics* (editor) (Oxford University Press, 1992)
- *Language variation in South Asia* (Oxford University Press, 1990)
- *American Indian Linguistics and Literature* (Mouton, 1984)
- *Discovered tongues: Poems by linguists* (editor) (Corvine Press, 1983)
- *Haiku journey: To the North Coast* (Copper Canyon Press, 1983)
- *Bibliography of the languages of Native California, including closely related languages of adjacent areas* (Scarescrow Press, 1982)

Though he contributed a lot to the field with his masterclass works, this list on Bright, you know, lists a few selected but not exhaustive works done by him in his career. ‘Native American Place Names of the United States’, published in 2004. ‘1,500 California Place Names: Their Origins and Meanings’ published in 1998. ‘The World's Writing System’, co-edited with Peter T. Daniels, Oxford University Press, 1996. ‘A Coyote Reader’, University of California Publications, 1993. Then, ‘International Encyclopaedia of Linguistics’, he was the editor of that, published by Oxford University Press 1992.


All these publications remain a rich source and a primary source of information in this field. You know publications like ‘Language Variation in South Asia’, a very important publication. Works like ‘American Indian Linguistics and Literature’ published by Mouton in 1984.

And ‘Discovered Tongues: Poems by Linguists’, a very amusing publication which came out in 1984. Then ‘Haiku Journey: To the North Coast’, published in 1983. ‘Bibliography of Languages of Native California, Including Closely Related Languages of Adjacent Areas’, published in 1982.

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- *Studies in California Linguistics* (1964),
- *Sociolinguistics: Proceedings* (1966),
- *Coyote Stories* (1978),
- The collected works of Edward Sapir, *American Indian languages*, volume 5, part 1 and volume 7 (1990) and volume 10 (1992),
- *The International encyclopaedia of linguistics* (1992), and
- the series *Oxford studies in anthropological linguistics*.
- He was also involved in preparing careful editions of his own writings: with Anwar Dil.
- *Variation and change in language: Essays by William Bright* (1976),
- *American Indian linguistics and literature* (1984), and
- *Language variation in South Asia* (1990), and,
- with Peter T. Daniels, *The world's writing systems* (1996),
- *Native American place names of the United States* (2004).



Other important publications which are worth mentioning here in the list are: ‘*Studies in California Linguistics*’ 1964, ‘*Sociolinguistics*’ 1966, ‘*Coyote Stories*’ 1978, ‘*The Collected Works of Edward Sapir, American Indian languages, Volume 5, Part 1 and Volume 7*’, published in 1990 and ‘*Volume 10*’, published in 1992.

The ‘*International Encyclopaedia of Linguistics*’, 1992. The series ‘*Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics*’. He was also involved in preparing careful editions of his own writings with Anwar Dil. And writings like ‘*Variation and Change in Language: Essays by William Bright*’ in 1976.

‘*American Indian Linguistics and Literature*’ was published in 1984. ‘*Language Variation in South Asia*’ was published in 1990. And with Peter T. Daniels, ‘*The World's Writing Systems*’ was published in 1996. ‘*Native American Place Names of the United States*’ was published in 2004.

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IN MEMORIAM: William Bright; by Joel Sherzer published in *Language in Society*, Volume 36, Issue 2, April 2007, pp. 151 - 155; Published online by Cambridge University Press: 19 March 2007

“I want finally to say a few words about the editorial work which, in the past ten years, has occupied so much of my attention. I enjoy this job: it puts me in touch with linguists of every type, in every part of the world; it keeps me abreast with the most stimulating new developments in linguistic thought; it gives me the satisfaction of helping my colleagues to disseminate their ideas in widely readable forms; and it lets me have the great fun of dealing with types and printing and publishing ... Whatever contributions I may have made to linguistics through teaching and research, I take a special pleasure in what I am able to contribute as an editor, and hope that the history of our field will show my efforts to have been useful” (in Anwar Dil, ed., 1976, *Variation and change in language: Essays by William Bright*:272-273).

And the most important you know statement, the most powerful statement I get from Joel Sherzer who published an obituary for William Bright, ‘In Memoriam: William Bright’, published in *Language in Society*, Volume 36, Issue 2, April 2007 and it was published online by Cambridge University Press on 19th March 2007. I quote from there. This talks about his love for editing and he himself reveals his keen interest and love for editing.

He remained editor; I mean, he continued being editor of two different journals: *Language in Society* and *Language* (of the Linguistic Society of America) for 22 years and 6 years of the other journal: 28 years of editing experience and immense contribution to the publication of research works in linguistics. And he himself recalls, I quote from that memoriam, “I want finally to say a few words about the editorial work which, in the past ten years, has occupied so much of my attention. I enjoy this job: it puts me in touch with linguists of every type, in every part of the world; it keeps me abreast with the most stimulating new developments in linguistic thought; it gives me a satisfaction of helping my colleagues to disseminate their ideas in widely readable form; and it lets me have the great fun of dealing with types and printing and publication...Whatever contributions I may have made to linguistics through teaching and research, I take a special pleasure in what I am able to contribute as an editor, and hope that the history of our field will show my efforts to have been useful.” This was published in Anwar Dil, edited volume 1976, ‘*Variation and Change in Languages: Essays by William Bright*’.

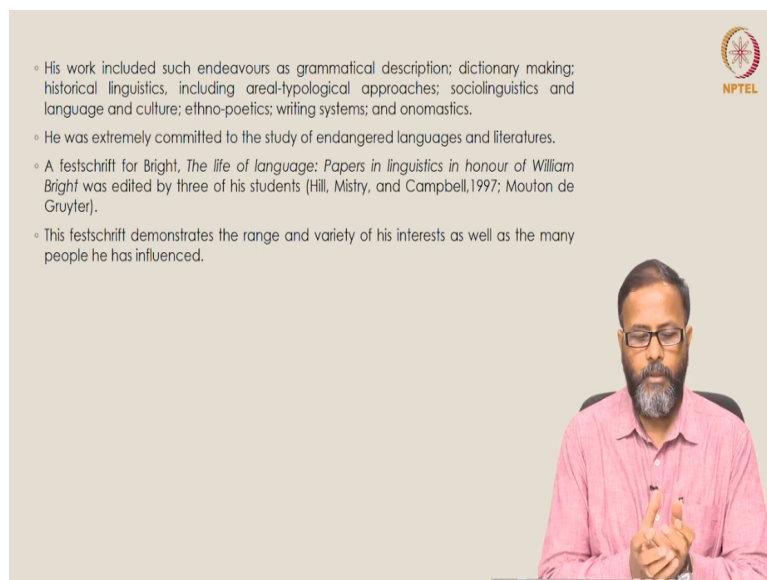
So William Bright as a scholar, as an author, as an editor remains to be inspiring and pioneering in the field. He was the one who created the groundwork for the emergence of the

discipline called Sociolinguistics. He is an authority on Native Indian languages of California and around places. He worked authoritatively on Tamil, Kannada and Tulu, and one other language called Lushai, amongst South Asian languages. His contribution as an editor in shaping the journal of Linguistic Society of America, *Language* is commendable. *Language* is considered one of the greatest and most influential journals in the field. He remained editor for 22 years. *Language in Society*, a very reputed journal, he remained an editor there for 6 years.

The encyclopaedia, dictionaries, monographs, reference materials and analytical research that he published and brought out on Native American Indian Languages is seminal and anyone who works in the area starts from that, and his work became the reference point of starting work in this area.

Karuk is the language he helped revitalize and reclaim, and he was given honorary membership to the tribe. He was the first outsider to be given membership of the tribe. So that was an acknowledgement of his immense contribution and instrumentality. And he remains one of the founding fathers of Sociolinguistics beyond doubt.

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- His work included such endeavours as grammatical description; dictionary making; historical linguistics, including areal-typological approaches; sociolinguistics and language and culture; ethno-poetics; writing systems; and onomastics.
- He was extremely committed to the study of endangered languages and literatures.
- A festschrift for Bright, *The life of language: Papers in linguistics in honour of William Bright* was edited by three of his students (Hill, Mistry, and Campbell, 1997; Mouton de Gruyter).
- This festschrift demonstrates the range and variety of his interests as well as the many people he has influenced.

His work included such endeavours as grammatical description; dictionary making; historical linguistics (including areal-typological approaches); sociolinguistics and language and culture; ethno-poetics; writing systems, and so on. He was extremely committed to the study of endangered languages and literatures and his work on Native American languages in and around California is the testimony of this.

A festschrift to William Bright, which was published by three of his students; Hill, Mistry and Campbell in 1997 by Mouton, was titled 'The Life of Language: Papers in Linguistics in Honour of William Bright'. This festschrift documents and demonstrates the range and variety of his interests as well as the many people he has influenced.

The career and academic journey of William Bright as a scholar, as a gifted teacher and as an accomplished editor is inspiring and he remains one of the greatest scholars and the major contributors in sociolinguistics and his contributions gave a definite shape to a newly emerged discipline called Sociolinguistics.

So this is it for now. We will meet with other pioneers in the field in our next class such as Susan Ervin Tripp, or for that matter, Allen Grimshaw, people like them. So, we will talk about all these people in our forthcoming classes. This is it for now. Thank you.