

# UC SANTA BARBARA

## Office of the Chancellor

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March 1, 2019

**Dear Members of our Campus Community,**

I regret to share the sad news that Professor Emeritus Wallace Chafe has passed away. Our deepest sympathies are extended to his wife, Professor Marianne Mithun. Professor Chafe was an internationally renowned and influential scholar of linguistics and we are deeply and forever grateful for his many notable contributions to our university, including his mentorship of generations of students. Our campus flag is lowered in his honor today, March 1. I would like to share this heartfelt tribute prepared by Graduate Dean Carol Genetti, Chair Mary Bucholtz, and our Department of Linguistics.

It is with great sadness that the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, announces the passing of our dear friend and colleague Professor Wallace (Wally) Chafe, at the age of 91, on February 3, 2019. An exceptionally deep-thinking and broad-ranging scholar, Professor Chafe produced over 230 books, articles, and other publications on semantics, discourse, prosody, cognition, and Native American languages which have been foundational to functional and usage-based approaches to linguistics.

Following a stint in the U.S. Navy in World War II, Professor Chafe attended Yale University, where he received a BA in German Literature (1950) and an MA (1956) and PhD (1958) in Linguistics. He began fieldwork on the Seneca language in 1956, initiating a relationship with the Seneca community that continued until his death more than sixty years later. Following completion of his doctorate at Yale, Professor Chafe worked for the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, where he began to study the Caddo language, also a lifelong pursuit. In 1962, Professor Chafe joined the faculty in Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, where he served as department chair from 1969 to 1974 and from 1977 to 1978, and as director of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages from 1975 until 1986. At that point, he—together with his wife and fellow linguist Professor Marianne Mithun—moved to UC Santa Barbara. Professor Chafe retired in 1991 but continued to hold the distinguished title of Research Professor and remained actively engaged with the UCSB Department of Linguistics. In 2008, he received the Constantine Panunzio Distinguished Emeritus Award, the University of California's top honor for emeriti faculty.

Professor Chafe's research in linguistics was wide in scope but unified by a drive to understand the interrelationship between language and the mind. He began this exploration with the study of semantics, later expanding his work to incorporate the nature of epistemology, cognition, and consciousness itself. At the center of his work is the idea that language both reflects and shapes the flow of thought and that this process is regulated by prosody in the production of spoken discourse. His interest in the role of time and consciousness in language encompassed a wide variety of issues, including the comparison of spoken and written discourse, the relationship between given and new information, and the function and classification of intonation units. His influential insights on these topics are collected in his major statement *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Professor Chafe's scholarship in other linguistic areas was equally seminal, including the famous Pear Stories project, which provided an innovative methodology for comparing discourse features across typologically diverse languages (*The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural, and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*, Ablex 1980); his groundbreaking work on evidentiality with Professor Johanna Nichols (*Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*, Ablex, 1986); and his magisterial study of laughter, humor, and emotion (*The Importance of Not Being Earnest: The Feeling Behind Laughter and Humor*, John Benjamins, 2007). His final theoretical book, *Thought-Based Linguistics: How Languages Turn Thoughts into Sounds* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) is his most provocative, laying out a strong argument that the study of thoughts should be central to linguistics.

Professor Chafe also produced extensive and important scholarship in Native American linguistics, including grammars of Seneca (*A Grammar of the Seneca Language*, University of California Press, 2015) and Caddo (*The Caddo Language: A Grammar, Texts, and Dictionary Based on Materials Collected by the Author in Oklahoma between 1960 and 1970*, Mundart Press, 2018) and the relationships among these and other language families (*The Caddoan, Iroquoian, and Siouan Languages*, Mouton, 1976). Professor Chafe was honored for his contributions to the preservation of Native American languages at a symposium held at the Louvain Institute in Belgium in 2005.

Professor Chafe's scholarly memoir, originally published in 2002 in *Historiographia Linguistica*, appears on his UCSB website: <http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/faculty/chafe/memoir.htm>.

Those who knew him remember Wally as a kind and gentle man as well as a beloved friend and mentor. He and Marianne opened their home and their hearts to twenty-five years of UCSB linguists, creating a warm community and a welcoming space for intellectual dialogue and debate. He will be deeply missed by his colleagues, students, friends, and family. People wishing to honor his legacy are invited to contribute to UCSB's Chafe and Mithun Fund for Research on Understudied Languages: <https://giving.ucsb.edu/Funds/Dept/linguistics>.

Sincerely,

Henry T. Yang  
Chancellor