Encounters with Frank Siebert

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I first met Frank Siebert in 1963. Driving back to Cambridge from Maliseet fieldwork in Woodstock, New Brunswick, Karl Teeter, his family, and I detoured to Old Town and made our way onto Indian Island, where we asked the way to Andrew Dana's. The scene that greeted us was unforgettable. Andrew was in a wheel chair, having had a leg amputated as a consequence of diabetes. (He was later to lose the other one.) Frank was sitting opposite him checking Penobscot vocabulary from a file. Our arrival disrupted the work, and soon Frank, Karl, and I were launched into a discussion of linguistic topics. Andrew appeared to doze off. Then, suddenly, as Frank was holding forth about the meaning of something in Penobscot, Andrew perked up and interjected: "Frank, your shwa is a little low in that word." The moment was emblematic of the long and intense collaboration between Andrew and Frank, then entering or about to enter its fourth decade, which produced so much insight into the Penobscot language.

I next saw Frank at the Ottawa conference on Algonquian linguistics in August 1964. Frank talked on Penobscot phonemics and on the homeland of the Algonquians. The breadth and meticulousness of his scholarship was fully evident as he discussed his research into the earliest known distributions of the plant and animal species on which he based his reconstruction. Some years later, Tony Arlotto, who was writing his *Introduction to Historical Linguistics*, used Frank's reconstruction of the Proto-Algonquian homeland, with several of his maps, in his chapter on "Language and History." It thus became, literally, a text-book example of the method for reconstructing prehistory from linguistic evidence (Siebert 1967; Arlotto 1972).

Over the years I learned from Frank about the circumstances attending his fieldwork and his other linguistic contributions. One of the most notable was his paper, "Certain Proto-Algonquian Clusters," that appeared in *Language* in 1941 (Siebert 1941). Problems had surfaced in trying to reconcile Eastern Algonquian languages with the system of consonant clusters reconstructed by Leonard Bloomfield in 1925 on the basis of Fox, Cree, Menominee, and Ojibwa (Bloomfield 1925). During the first six months of 1941 Frank was in a hiatus in his medical training as he moved between positions, and he naturally decided to go off and do fieldwork, in this case with the last speakers of Catawba in South Carolina. After winding up his work with the Catawbas, Frank drove through Chapel Hill, where Bloomfield and Carl Voegelin were teaching field methods at the Linguistic Institute. Bloomfield had written the first version of his paper "Algonquian," always referred to as "the Sketch," and the Algonquianists were discussing the problem of reconciling the Eastern Algonquian facts. Voegelin's paper, "Proto-Algonquian Consonant Clusters in Delaware," had just appeared in *Language*, claiming that Unami (Oklahoma Delaware) showed "multiple reflexes" for some reconstructed clusters (Voegelin, 1941). Frank had another solution, one that involved the recognition of an additional cluster in Proto-Algonquian. Bloomfield encouraged Frank to submit his paper on the subject, which he finished typing in a roadside

tourist cabin on his way to Cincinnati to take up a job as a resident in pathology, and mailed off. It appeared in the December issue of *Language*, a methodological gem, and its results were incorporated into the published version of Bloomfield's "Sketch" (Siebert 1941; Bloomfield 1946).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation made grants to the Penobscot Nation to support the preparation of Frank's Penobscot dictionary and other work. A preliminary version of the dictionary was produced in a few copies in 1984, not without difficulties (Siebert 1984). Frank was also working intensively during this time on his Penobscot texts. A few years earlier I had organized a small group of Washington-area linguists with interests in American Indian languages as the Gallatin Philological Society, which met periodically in the evenings. Albert Gallatin, the fourth U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, made the first competent classification of American Indian languages. As luck would have it, Sally McLendon, a Gallatin member, had a summer place in Maine, and she agreed to host a special meeting there, to which Frank would be invited as the speaker. Frank duly arrived on Little Cranberry Island, off Mount Desert Island, and gave a memorable presentation of his editions and translations of three of his closely held Penobscot texts, "Morning Star," "Gluskabe and Moose," and "The Hairless Bear," all accompanied by long notes displaying the full breadth of his knowledge of Penobscot language and culture and Maine history. These texts and many more now await publication by the American Philosophical Society, and soon all will be able to enjoy and profit from them, the culmination of a lifetime of work dedicated to the preservation and understanding of a world now slipping forever away.

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