Scott Paauw is a visiting Professor of Linguistics at the University of Rochester

jur: Could you fill us in on your educational and professional background?

Paauw: I first discovered the field of linguistics when I as an undergraduate in an exchange program in Malaysia took some courses in linguistics. I was very interested in how language and society interacted - that was back in 1976. From that point, I became a linguistics major. I got a B.A. in linguistics from the University of Michigan in 1979 and then I entered the workforce. Before I finished my undergraduate degree I’d been teaching English in Indonesia; I returned to Indonesia where I taught English for a couple of years, and then I started my own English school. I worked there from 1982 to 2002, running an English school, teaching English, and developing programs to prepare Indonesian students to study at universities in the United States. But I had always wanted to get back into theoretical linguistics, and in 2002 I came back and I did a program in Canada at York University in Toronto, where I got an M.A. in theoretical linguistics. I’m currently working on a Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Buffalo, and teaching there and here at the same time. So I have 30 years of teaching experience, in both theoretical and applied linguistics.

jur: Could you tell us about any research you’re currently involved with and research you’ve conducted with in the past?

Paauw: The research I’ve been involved with for the last few years has all related to the dialects of the Malay language, and trying to discover how varieties of the language developed in different geographical locations. And to define the problem itself involves a lot of different questions that have to be answered, in terms of historical dispersal of people throughout the Indonesian islands, the kinds of languages that already existed in areas, contact between different languages, and other historical and linguistic factors that are involved in these things. The first question that I set out to answer was based on something I read in a book that said that Indonesian was basically a Creole language. I set out to investigate that question and discovered it was completely untrue, but that there were contact varieties of Indonesian in various locations of Indonesia that many people considered to be Creole languages, and, through further investigation, I have concluded that none of them are actually Creole languages. A Creole language is a language that has been simplified through contact between two different societies. It’s basically a two step process. First, two different groups of people need a language to communicate in; we call that a Pidgin language, which is a simplified variety of one of the languages in the contact situation. Then when people begin using it, speaking it, and teaching it to their children and growing up with it as a native language, we call it a Creole. But my conclusion after looking at the Indonesian situation was that these varieties which have been called Creoles by many observers are not indeed Creoles. The chief evidence for that was that the simplification that was said to have occurred occurs in all varieties of the language throughout the Malay-speaking world. So that was the first question that I set out to examine. And when I got involved in that question, two other problems occurred. One is that there has never been a thorough classification of the varieties of the Malay language (some people might consider these dialects) that are spoken over a vast area, over thousands of miles in area. The language itself has been a language of wider communication for perhaps 2000 years; it’s been a lingua franca, a language which is used by groups to communicate between groups that speak different languages, for perhaps 2000 years. And it is dispersed over a wide area, and there’s been no classification of the different varieties. So I set about working on a classification of the languages. And in the meantime I discovered that there are varieties spoken even outside of Indonesia. One professor at York University in Toronto, Ian Smith, had worked in Sri Lanka, where he discovered a variety of Malay spoken there, and he collected data on it back in the 70s, but he didn’t know what to do with it because he didn’t know anything about Malay. So when he met me, he was very happy we were able to work together. We ended up doing quite a bit of research on this variety of Sri Lankan Malay together, and presenting papers on it at various conferences, including the Linguistics Society of America, and publishing a couple of articles about this language variety. I continued to work on that as well. It’s a little-known, little-described, little-understood variety of Malay which has arisen because of contact between two very different societies, the
Malay speaking workers who were brought to the Sri Lanka by the colonial administrations of the Dutch and the British and put into contact with speakers of Indian languages, both Sinhala, which is a North Indian language spoken in Sri Lanka, and Tamil, which is a Dravidian (South Indian) language also spoken in Sri Lanka, and these two languages have had a tremendous influence on the structure of the Malay spoken there. These languages have been in contact to the point that the Malay spoken in Sri Lanka is not intelligible in any way with the Malay spoken in Indonesia, although the words are exactly the same. So what they've done is taken the words and put them in a completely alien order. The words look the same, but they have a completely different word order, to the point even the written language can't be understood. I found that very surprising. It's as if somebody took English and rearranged the words so we couldn't understand what they were saying, they rearranged them so much that we had no idea what was going on. The whole idea of language contact, what happens when two languages meet, is a fascinating one to me, and by its very nature it's interdisciplinary, because we have to look at historical factors, linguistic factors, sociological factors, and all of these interact in a very interesting way.

A lot of my analysis of Sri Lankan Malay has had to do with the socio-historical factors, rather than the linguistic factors, because they've made the language what it is today. And one of the articles that I've published on this topic was co-authored with a historian, B.A. Hussainmiya, because history is just as important as linguistics when we're looking at these questions. Other than that, I'm involved in a few other research questions at the present, involving both Malay and non-Malay languages, other languages of Indonesia, Indonesian, in particular. There are so many questions to be answered, and just a limited amount of time to look at them. That pretty much covers the research I'm doing at present.

jur: What are your future goals with your research?

Paauw: I'd like to collect a lot more data through linguistic field work mainly in Indonesia on varieties of Malay, so I can have a much more definitive typology of the different languages, a much more definitive picture of the variety of linguistic diversity that goes under the banner of the Malay language. The Malay language, by the way, just for a little background, is a major world language. It's spoken as a first or second language by probably close to 250 million people, and it's a national language in Indonesia, the fourth most populous country in the world, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. It's a minority language in Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the Netherlands. It's pretty much a language that's unknown to people in this country; even though it is a major world language with a large number of speakers and a large literature in and about the language, it's pretty much a mystery to Americans. Indonesia has been called the best-kept secret in the world, because of various historical and societal factors, but it's an area that's of great interest to me. So, I'd like to eventually come up with a definitive classification of the language and the varieties of the language. There are all these other topics I know that will interest me along the way, but that's sort of where my path is headed right now.

jur: How do you feel that a diverse background in so many different disciplines has enabled you to excel in your research? Does it provide you with a distinct advantage?

Paauw: Absolutely. In linguistics there seems to be a tendency and has been a tendency over the last 30 years or so to focus only on the field. Anything that isn't focused solely on the synchronic analysis of the language (the language as it is now) is somehow regarded as irrelevant. To me it misses the whole beauty of language and the most exciting part of linguistics, which is how cultures interact, how cultures define their language, and how contact between languages, cultures, and societies reshapes the language. The historical factors that play both within one language and between languages are to me the most exciting part of the language. So, I open up my research to many different disciplines when I'm looking at languages. There are more and more people doing the same sort of thing. There are areas of linguistics, such as historical linguistics, which looks at the historical side of things, and socio-linguistics, which looks at the social factors that shape linguistics, which are a part of the field, but are not the most highly regarded parts of the field, because they are not solely interested in theoretical questions. The theoretical questions which have been investigated by linguists in most programs are fascinating questions and they are very important questions and I don't mean to make them sound at all unimportant, but there are other things out there and other disciplines that are important. One of the most interesting theories that has come along in the last ten years or so is a set of theories of human settlement, the idea that mankind evolved in Africa and then went from Africa and settled the world, and that this can be reconstructed. The patterns of settlement can be reconstructed using genetic data, archaeological data, and linguistic data to trace the settlement of the world, the waves of migration that have made the planet what it is today. There has been some fascinating research integrating these different areas by geneticists such as Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza. In his book *Genes, Peoples and Languages*, he traces the history of mankind through genetic data, linguistic data, and archaeological data. In my part of the world, there has been some work in this area as well. Cavalli-Sforza has basically mapped the entire world and the genes of the entire world and his work alone is already relevant. There have been historians as well, such as Peter Bellwood from Australia and Leonard Andaya, who have looked at the prehistory of the Indonesian isles, the original settlement patterns, the archaeology, and then worked with linguists to coordinate it with linguistic data so that we have an idea of the settlement patterns of the Indonesian islands dating back three or four thousand years. So the only reason we are able to have these understandings is by combining the research in different disciplines. If an archaeologist only digs up something and doesn't share it with other disciplines, we have no idea how it applies and how it relates to settlement patterns that we can see through genetic data or linguistic data. This can be done only by combining all the different areas and theories of human settlement, such as the theories posited by Jared Diamond. It was something in one of his books that led me to one of my first research questions. He integrates language into everything he does, which I think is fascinating. And he does have a solid understanding of linguistic theories,
and I find the students motivated, interested, and a pleasure enjoyed my time here. I find the school an outstanding one something will come up again in the future. I certainly have course. So, I am here at the U of R for this term and hopefully words to give a basis for further learning for the students in the talk about the linguistic theory behind the units that make up other languages break down the world linguistically and to complex ways of looking at the world. In the class, I have tried the ends of words. In English we have a fairly simple system, inflection in English like the “ing” or the “ed” or the “s” at when they are trying to study for the SAT, and simple verbal Latin suffixes that give high school students so many headaches example, this parsing consists of affixes, prefixes and suffixes: the a zoologist than to a linguist. In linguistic morphology we look disciplines, and it is a term that means something different to morphology. Morphology is a term that appears in many Rochester?

Paauw: Here at the U of R I’m only working with the students I’m teaching. I also teach at the University of Buffalo, where I have students I work with every semester. I am not directly supervising any independent study, but I do advise students who are looking for ideas and are working on various projects. I also like to be available for students all the time. My students here, I’m sure, will know they can always use me as a resource in the future, even if I’m not teaching here.

jur: What opportunities exist for undergraduates interested in becoming involved in research in your field?

Paauw: There’s a tremendous amount of opportunities. If we’re considering my field, Indonesian linguistics, which is what I consider it, Indonesia is a country with hundreds of languages, many of which have been little-studied and little-described. For anyone who would like an interesting experience living overseas and doing linguistic field research, there is a tremendous amount of activities in a country that welcomes foreign scientists and academics, and a society where there’s a wealth of information that we don’t know and can be learned and will help add to the sum of our knowledge. If fifty students came to me and asked where they could work in Indonesia, I could give them fifty different answers, and it would help us understand linguistically, historically, and socially what is going on better. Additionally, there are exchange programs in Indonesia for students, and in other countries in Southeast Asia, which I highly recommend as well, places like Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, which all have related languages spoken in them. My areas of interest are ones that definitely would welcome undergraduates who are interested in them. Short of leaving the country, it’s pretty hard. At the University of Rochester, no Indonesian languages are taught. The closest place that I know teaches Indonesian languages is Cornell. There are about seven or eight programs in the United States, which is pretty sad for one of the largest languages in the world, for the fourth most populous country in the world; there’s maybe seven or eight out of 2700 schools in the United States where it’s taught - Cornell, Yale, Berkeley, Hawaii, Northern Illinois for some reason, and the University of Washington.

jur: In your opinion, how important is interdisciplinary work to your field and in general?

Paauw: I’m a strong advocate of interdisciplinary work. I think that when a discipline has blinders on it, it really can’t move forward, it’s not really adding to human knowledge. It’s when you can expand your horizons, when you can see what other people have done. When you look at Jared Diamond’s work, for example, I mean, he’s a biologist! He first got into this whole thing when he was studying the development of plant and animal life in New Guinea. That led him to studying how this happened, and then he started studying the history of human societies, and that meant that he had to have historical information, linguistic information, agricultural information,
sociological, genetics, everything: it all came in. There are linguists who are working on this sort of thing. There is a fellow at Stanford named Merritt Ruhlen who is trying to bring everything back to the mother language that all human languages descended from, and finding patterns of the descent, drawing a family tree of all the languages of the world. And he works correlating his findings with genetic data, because the genetic data is sort of the family tree of the world - we're all related; despite what some wacko might believe, everyone is related, and we all started in Africa, and it can be traced. There's only one human race; it's just different ethnic groups among it.