



In Memoriam: Ronald Richard Butters

(1940–2021)

By I. M. Nick

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In 2007, a unique consulting firm opened for business. Called TrademarkLinguistics,¹ the company provided expert advice for firms in litigation over the use, interpretation, and defamation of trademarks. The business model of the company filled a long-overlooked niche. While there were already countless US firms that offered corporate customers legal advice, TrademarkLinguistics was one of the first to provide expert linguistic assessments as well. From etymology to pragmatics, syntax to semantics, the company's consultant promised professional advisement in both the letter of the law and science of language. As with any enterprise, long-term success requires more than simply a novel idea. It also necessitates an entrepreneur who has foresight, intelligence, and talent. For 25 years, that is precisely what the owner of TradeMarkLinguistics, Professor Ronald Butters, did.

Before entering the corporate world as a linguistic consultant, Professor Butters had spent nearly twice that time building up his first career as an internationally recognized academic scholar.² From early on, he distinguished himself as being outstanding in his field. In 1962, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in English with high honors from the University of Iowa. Just five years later, he graduated from the same university with a Ph.D. in English Linguistics. Immediately after his graduation, he was awarded an assistant professorship in the English Department of Duke University, where he remained a member of faculty for the next 40 years. During his long tenure at Duke, he taught and published on a wide variety of topics within sociolinguistics and dialectology. He also served as an editorial referee and Editor of *American Speech* as well as the Vice President and then President of the American Dialect Society. His excellence in teaching, researching, and publishing also eventually led to his being named Chair of Dukes' Departments of English and Linguistics.

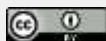
Although he remained faithful to his alma mater, over his lifetime, Professor Butters also served a number of years as a visiting professor in England, Spain, Germany, and Morocco. During his time abroad, Professor Butters developed an extensive interdisciplinary network of scholars. Despite the diversity of their academic specializations, these scholars all shared a common interest in applied linguistics and a deep commitment to investigating the real-life impacts of language use upon legal rights and privileges. This area of applied linguistics is today commonly known as "Forensic Linguistics" (FL). One of the pioneers of FL, Professor Butters was one of the founding members of the Language and Law Association. A tireless advocate of the benefits of applying expert linguistic analysis to questions of criminal and civil law, he rose to become President of the International Association for Forensic Linguistics (IAFL). He also served as co-editor of the IAFL scholarly publication, *The International Journal of Speech, Language, and Law*.

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His FL publications explore a wide variety of crime types. However, the majority of his FL work centers on the language of trademarks. His writings on the language of trademark linguistics are considered essential readings for new scholars entering the field. Within onomastics, his research into the ways in which names are used in trademarks has also been seminal for name scholars who investigate brand names and product names.³ His work on controversial US corporate naming policies and practices has also been broadly read in both scientific and lay circles. Professor Butters' contribution to onomastic science was not only of a scientific nature. He also was an avid and long-term member of the American Name Society and several ANS affiliates (e.g., the American Dialect Society, the Dictionary Society of North America, and the Linguistic Society of America).

Given the breadth of Professor Butters' activities, it comes as no surprise that news of his passing has caused seismic waves throughout the international linguistic community. In addition to expressing shock over the loss of this respected scholar, many of his former colleagues and students have voiced their sympathy for his bereaved family and friends. Among his many relatives, Professor Butters is survived by two brothers, Tom and Don Butters; his husband, Stewart Aycock; his daughters, Catherine Butters Blum and Rachel Butters Willis; seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The American Name Society expresses its sincere condolences to Professor Butters' family, friends, and colleagues.

Endnotes

¹ At the writing of this record, Professor Butters' business website was still operational. Information on his company, TrademarkLinguistics, may be found here: <http://trademarklinguistics.com>.

² Unless otherwise indicated, the biographical information provided here is taken from Professor Butters' 2017 CV. For details, see http://trademarklinguistics.com/Ron_Butters_CV.html.

³ ANS readers may be interested in the selected list of Professor Butters' publications presented below.

Recommended Reading by Ron Butters

2004. "Linguistic Change in Words One Owns: How Trademarks become 'Generic'." In *Studies in the History of the English Language II*, edited by Anne Curzan and Kim Emmons, 111–123. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

2008. "A Linguistic Look at Trademark Dilution." *Santa Clara Computer and High Technology Law Journal* 24, no. 3: 101–113.

2008. "Trademarks and Other Proprietary Terms." In *Dimensions of Forensic Linguistics*, edited by John Gibbons and M. Teresa Turrell, 231–247. New York: John Benjamins.

2010. "Trademarking: Language That One Owns." *Routledge Handbook of Forensic Linguistics*, edited by Malcolm Coulthard and Alison Johnson, 351–364. New York: Routledge.

2012. "Linguistic Issues in Copyright Law." *Oxford Handbook of Language and Law*, edited by Lawrence Solan and Peter Tiersma, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2013. "Semiotic Interpretation in Trademark Law." In *Law, Culture, and Visual Studies*, edited by Anne Wagner and Richard Sherwin, 261–282. New York: Springer.