SEMANTICS: I
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521291651

© Cambridge University Press 1977

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1977
Reprinted 1978, 1979, 1981 (with new index of subjects),

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Lyons, John
Semantics.
Includes bibliographies and indexes.
3. Grammar, Comparative and general. I. Title.
P325.L96  410    76-40838


Transferred to digital printing 2009

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel
timetables and other factual information given in this work are correct at
the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee
the accuracy of such information thereafter.
Contents to Volume 1

Typographical conventions x  Preface xi

1 Introduction: some basic terms and concepts  1
  1.1. The meaning of ‘meaning’  1
  1.2. Use and mention  5
  1.3. Object-language and metalanguage  10
  1.4. Type and token  13
  1.5. Forms, lexemes and expressions  18
  1.6. Theories, models and data  25

2 Communication and information  32
  2.1. What is communication?  32
  2.2. A simple model of communication  36
  2.3. The quantification of information  43
  2.4. Descriptive, social and expressive information  50

3 Language as a semiotic system  57
  3.1. Verbal and non-verbal signalling  57
  3.2. Paralinguistic phenomena  63
  3.3. Language and medium  67
  3.4. The design features of language  74
  3.5. The origin of language  85

4 Semiotics  96
  4.1. Signification  96
  4.2. Symbols, icons, indices and symptoms  99
  4.3. Nominalism, realism and conceptualism  109
  4.4. Syntactics, semantics and pragmatics  114

5 Behaviourist semantics  120
  5.1. General attitudes  120
  5.2. More particular features of behaviourism  123
Contents to Volume I

5.3. Behaviourist theories of meaning 125
5.4. Evaluation of behaviourist semantics 133

6 Logical semantics
6.1. The formalization of semantics 138
6.2. Propositional calculus 141
6.3. Predicate calculus 147
6.4. The logic of classes 154
6.5. Time, modality and possible worlds 161

7 Reference, sense and denotation
7.1. Introductory 174
7.2. Reference 177
7.3. Sense 197
7.4. Denotation 206
7.5. Naming 215
7.6. Reference, sense and denotation in language-acquisition 224

8 Structural semantics I: semantic fields
8.1. Structuralism 230
8.2. The Saussurean dichotomies 239
8.3. Relativism and functionalism 245
8.4. Semantic fields 250
8.5. Syntagmatic lexical relations 261
8.6. General evaluation of the theory of semantic fields 267

9 Structural semantics II: sense relations
9.1. Opposition and contrast 270
9.2. Directional, orthogonal and antipodal opposition 281
9.3. Non-binary contrasts 287
9.4. Hyponymy 291
9.5. Hierarchical structure in the vocabulary 295
9.6. Lexical gaps 301
9.7. Marked and unmarked terms 305
9.8. Part–whole relations 311
9.9. Componental analysis 317

Bibliography 336

Index 357
Contents to Volume 2

Typographical conventions  Preface

10 Semantics and grammar I
  10.1. Levels of analysis
  10.2. Grammaticality
  10.3. Generative grammar
  10.4. Grammatical ambiguity
  10.5. Generative semantics

11 Semantics and grammar II
  11.1. Parts-of-speech, form-classes and expression-classes
  11.2. Subjects, predicates and predicators
  11.3. The ontological basis: entities, qualities and actions
  11.4. Determiners, quantifiers and classifiers

12 Semantics and grammar III
  12.1. Kernel-sentences and sentence-nuclei
  12.2. Predicative structures
  12.3. Locative subjects
  12.4. Valency
  12.5. Causativity and transivity
  12.6. Participant-roles and circumstantial roles
  12.7. Theme, rheme and focus

13 The Lexicon
  13.1. Lexical entries
  13.2. Complex lexemes
Contents to Volume 2

13.3 Compound lexemes
13.4 Homonymy and polysemy

14 Context, style and culture
14.1 The context-of-utterance
14.2 Communicative competence
14.3 Conversational implicatures and presupposition
14.4 The contextual theory of meaning
14.5 Stylistic, dialectal and diachronic variation
14.6 Sentences and texts

15 Deixis, space and time
15.1 Person-deixis
15.2 Demonstratives and the definite article
15.3 Deixis, anaphora and the universe-of-discourse
15.4 Tense and deictic temporal reference
15.5 Spatial expressions
15.6 Aspect
15.7 Localism

16 Mood and illocutionary force
16.1 Speech-acts
16.2 Commands, requests and demands
16.3 Questions
16.4 Negation
16.5 The performative analysis of sentences

17 Modality
17.1 Necessity and possibility
17.2 Epistemic modality and factivity
17.3 Tense as a modality
17.4 Deontic modality
17.5 Obligation, permission, prohibition and exemption
17.6 A tentative synthesis

Bibliography

Index
# Figures

## VOLUME 1

1. A model of communication page 36  
2. The triangle of signification 96  
3. Truth-table for the one-place negation connective 143  
4. Truth-tables for the two-place connectives 144  
5. Venn diagrams illustrating the union and intersection of classes 158  
6. Various kinds of diachronic change 256  
7. A model of a hierarchically organized vocabulary 295  

## VOLUME 2

8. A sample phrase-marker  
9. The so-called standard theory  
10. The so-called generative semantics theory  
11. Schematic representation of a lexical entry
Typographical conventions

**Small Capitals**
For sense-components and other more abstract elements, or correlates, of meaning (cf. 9.9).

**Italics**
1. For forms (as distinct from lexemes or expressions: cf. 1.5) in their orthographic representation.
2. For certain mathematical and logical symbols, according to standard conventions.

Single quotation-marks
1. For lexemes and expressions (cf. 1.5).
2. For the citation of sentences (i.e. system-sentences: cf. 1.6).
3. For titles of articles.

Double quotation-marks
1. For meanings (cf. 1.5).
2. For propositions (cf. 6.2).
3. For quotations from other authors.

**Asterisk**
For technical terms when first introduced and occasionally thereafter to remind the reader of their technical sense.

**Notes**
1. When a term has been furnished with an asterisk, single quotation-marks are not used.
2. Single quotation-marks are omitted when a sentence, expression or lexeme is numbered and set on a different line; but italics and double quotation-marks are still used in such circumstances.
3. In quotations from other authors, the original typographical conventions have usually been preserved. Occasionally adjustments have been made in order to avoid confusion or ambiguity.
Preface

When I began writing this book six years ago, it was my intention to produce a fairly short one-volume introduction to semantics which might serve the needs of students in several disciplines and might be of interest to the general reader. The work that I have in fact produced is far longer, though in certain respects it is less comprehensive, than I originally anticipated; and for that reason it is being published in two volumes.

Volume 1 is, for the most part, more general than volume 2; and it is relatively self-contained. In the first seven chapters, I have done my best, within the limitations of the space available, to set semantics within the more general framework of semiotics (here defined as the investigation of both human and non-human signalling-systems); and I have tried to extract from what ethologists, psychologists, philosophers, anthropologists and linguists have had to say about meaning and communication something that amounts to a consistent, if rather eclectic, approach to semantics. One of the biggest problems that I have had in writing this section of the book has been terminological. It is frequently the case in the literature of semantics and semiotics that the same terms are employed in quite different senses by different authors or that there are several alternatives for what is essentially the same phenomenon. All I can say is that I have been as careful as possible in selecting between alternative terms or alternative interpretations of the same terms and, within the limits of my own knowledge of the field, in drawing the reader’s attention to certain terminological pitfalls. At one time, I had hoped to be able to follow the practice of never using non-technically any word that was also employed anywhere in the book in some technical sense or other. I soon had to abandon this rather quixotic ambition! Some of the most ordinary words of English (e.g., ‘case’, ‘feature’, ‘aspect’) are employed in a highly specialized sense in linguistics and related disciplines; and, however hard I tried, I found it impossible to
Preface

get by without them. I trust that the context (and the device of using asterisks for introducing technical terms) will reduce, if it does not entirely eliminate, ambiguity and the possibility of misunderstanding.

The last two chapters of volume 1 are devoted to structural semantics (or, more precisely, to structural lexicology). This is a topic that I have been concerned with, on and off, for the best part of 20 years; and, although the so-called structuralist approach to semantics is no longer as fashionable among linguists as it once was, I still believe that it has much to contribute to the analysis of language.

Volume 2 may be read, independently of volume 1, by anyone who is already familiar with, or is prepared to take on trust, notions and distinctions explained in volume 1. In volume 2, which (apart from the chapter on Context, Style and Culture) is concerned with semantics from a fairly narrowly linguistic point of view, I have been tempted to do something more than merely clarify and systematize the work of others; and this accounts for the fact that the book, as a whole, has taken me far longer to write than I had expected. Five of the eight chapters in volume 2 – two of the three chapters on Semantics and Grammar, the chapter on Deixis, Space and Time, the chapter on Mood and Illocutionary Force, and the chapter on Modality – contain sections in which, unless I am mistaken, there are a few ideas of my own. Caveat lector!

As I have said, the book is, in certain respects, less comprehensive than I intended. There is nothing on etymology and historical semantics, or on synonymy; and there is very little on the structure of texts (or so-called text-linguistics), or on metaphor and style. If I had dealt with these topics, I should have had to make my book even longer. Sometimes one must stop even if one has not finished!

As I write this Preface, I am all too conscious of having just moved from Edinburgh where I have now spent twelve years, in one of the finest Departments of Linguistics in the world. Throughout this time I have benefited, in my writing and in my teaching, from the advice and criticisms of my colleagues in several Departments. Many of them have helped me, as far as the present book is concerned, by reading sections of it for me in draft and commenting upon them or by discussing (and in some instances originating) the ideas that have found their way into my text: John Anderson, R. E. Asher, Martin Atkinson, Gillian Brown, Keith Brown, John Christie, Kit Fine, Patrick Griffiths, Stephen Isard, W. E. Jones, John Laver, Christopher Longuet-Higgins, J. E. Miller, Keith Mitchell, Barry Richards, and James Thorne. Ron Asher and
Preface

Bill Jones have been especially helpful: each of them has read the whole typescript; and Bill Jones has undertaken to do the index for me. Apart from these Edinburgh and ex-Edinburgh colleagues, there are many others to whom I am indebted for their comments on drafts of parts of the book: Harry Bracken, Simon Dik, R. M. Dixon, Françoise Dubois-Charlier, Newton Garver, Gerald Gazdar, Arnold Glass, F. W. Householder, Rodney Huddleston, R. A. Hudson, Ruth Kempson, Geoffrey Leech, Adrienne Lehrer, David Makinson, P. H. Matthews, G. A. Miller, R. H. Robins, Geoffrey Sampson, the late Stephen Ullmann, Anthony Warner. There are doubtless many errors and inadequacies that remain but without the aid of so many friends, whose specialized knowledge in many of the relevant fields is far greater than my own, I should have gone astray more often than I have done.

Like all teachers, I have learned more from my students over the years than they have learned from me. It has been my privilege to conduct several research seminars and to supervise a fair number of Ph.D. dissertations on semantics during the period when I was writing this book. Two of my students I must mention by name, since I am very conscious of having derived directly from them some of the points that appear in the book: Marilyn Jessen and Claudia Guimarães de Lemos. I have no doubt, however, that others of my students are also responsible for much of what I think of as being original in the second volume.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Rena Somerville who, as my secretary in the last few years (the best secretary that I have ever had), has typed so many versions of certain sections of my manuscript that she could probably reproduce at least the gist of them from memory! Much of this work she has done at home in the evenings and at the weekend: I trust that her family will forgive me for the time that I have stolen from them in this way.

Finally, I must record my gratitude to my wife and children for their willingness to put up with my frequent bouts of depression, ill-temper or sheer absent-mindedness while I was writing the book and the postponement of so many promised outings and holidays. More particularly I wish to thank my wife for the love and support that she has always given me, in my writing as in everything.

J. L.

Falmer, Sussex
November 1976