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A Short History of Structural Linguistics

This book is a concise history of structural linguistics, charting its development from the 1870s to the present day. It explains what structuralism was and why its ideas are still central today. For structuralists a language is a self-contained and tightly organised system whose history is of changes from one state of the system to another. This idea has its origin in the nineteenth century and was developed in the twentieth by Saussure and his followers, including the school of Bloomfield in the United States. Through the work of Chomsky, especially, it is still very influential. Peter Matthews examines the beginnings of structuralism and analyses the vital role played in it by the study of sound systems and the problems of how systems change. He discusses theories of the overall structure of a language, the 'Chomskyan revolution' in the 1950s, and the structuralist theories of meaning.

PETER MATTHEWS is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Syntax* (1981), *Morphology* (2nd edn, 1991) and *Grammatical Theory in the United States: From Bloomfield to Chomsky* (1993), also published by Cambridge University Press.

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In memoriam
R. H. R.
1921–2000

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Preface

The last chapter of this book was finished on the day when Bobby Robins, whose *A Short History of Linguistics* has been admired for more than thirty years, was found dead. It is with sadness and affection that I dedicate it, with its presumptuously similar title, to his memory.

I was initially not at all sure how this history should be written: in particular, how selective and, in consequence, how long it should be. For advice at that stage I am especially grateful to Jeremy Mynott and, in a sense that they will understand, to my fellow editors of the Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. Conversations with Kasia Jaszczolt have since helped, at various times, to clarify my thinking.

I am also grateful to Andrew Winnard for waiting patiently for the book to be written.