

# Preface

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.10.01pre>

Pages vii–ix of

**Perspectives in Experimental Linguistics: Papers from the  
University of Alberta Conference on Experimental  
Linguistics, Edmonton, 1–14 Oct. 1978**

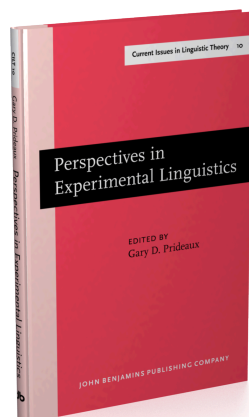
**Edited by Gary D. Prideaux**

[*Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 10] 1979. xi, 176 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)).

For further information, please contact [rights@benjamins.nl](mailto:rights@benjamins.nl) or consult our website at [benjamins.com/rights](http://benjamins.com/rights)



## PREFACE

GARY D. PRIDEAUX  
*University of Alberta*

For many years, experimentally oriented language study occupied a peripheral niche in departments of linguistics and psychology. Over the past few years, however, interest and research in experimental linguistics has shifted more toward centre stage, perhaps because of the growing recognition that purely theoretical formulations and speculations about language must necessarily be tested against the empirical facts of language knowledge, use, and acquisition. The increasing awareness of the crucial role of empirical studies has produced enormous gains as the discipline of linguistics struggles toward scientific maturity. In particular, considerable attention has been directed toward foundational issues, with the result that many of the familiar and once unquestioned claims and assumptions associated with the study of language have been called into question, notions such as what a language is, the competence-performance distinction, the infamous derivational theory of complexity, and the assumption of the primacy of syntax.

The growing interest in experimental issues has forced linguists to borrow experimental methodologies from their psychologist and engineer neighbours, as well as to develop new means of their own for the study of language phenomena. Imaginative and innovative techniques have been required in order to tap, albeit indirectly, native speaker judgements about acceptability, paraphrase, ambiguity, semantic similarity, perceptual distinctions, and many other aspects of

language use. Along with the adoption and invention of novel methodologies for the collection of data has come an increasing awareness of the extreme complexity and variety in the kinds of factors which influence language behaviour, ranging from 'purely linguistic' phenomena such as grammatical complexity to aspects of 'world knowledge' as distinct from grammatical knowledge, and from extremely subtle sociolinguistic and dialectal distinctions to varying problem-solving strategies which subjects may employ in various experimental situations. Furthermore, experimentally oriented linguists have been forced to acquire skills quite foreign to those traditionally associated with training in descriptive linguistics. Today the experimental linguist must be far more than an armchair theoretician. He must have an understanding of experimental design, statistics, physics, and calculus, and one of his primary research instruments is now the computer.

Because of the importance of the empirical study of language, the Department of Linguistics was formed within the Faculty of Science at the University of Alberta, with graduate research programs in psycholinguistics and in speech production and perception. On October 13-14, 1978, the Department hosted a conference focusing on 'Perspectives in Experimental Linguistics'. It was realized that since the range of experimental topics in linguistics is so broad, it would be virtually impossible to sample from every area while at the same time maintaining a high quality of papers and providing adequate time for extended discussions. As a result, six scholars were invited to present substantial contributions and six others were asked to present invited commentaries based on their prior reading of the invited papers. Extensive discussion sessions were also scheduled. To the best of our knowledge, this conference was the first of its kind to be held in Canada, and due to its success, a decision was made to publish the papers as soon as possible. Included here are revised versions of the six major presentations, plus an Epilogue, representing the closing session of the conference, chaired by W. J. Baker. That session was intended as a kind of 'summing up' and open discussion of many of the recurrent themes of the conference. A general bibliography is also included.

## PREFACE

The conference could not have taken place without the financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Conference Committee and the Faculty of Science of the University of Alberta. Our gratitude is extended to each of these agencies as well as to the Canadian Linguistic Association for its assistance. Professor E. F. K. Koerner provided considerable editorial guidance during the preparation of the manuscript for publication, and his assistance is greatly appreciated. Finally, it must be acknowledged that all the financial support would have been useless had it not been for the literally tireless work and enthusiastic good humor of Mrs. Helen B. Hawkes, the Administrative Assistant in the Department of Linguistics. To her goes a hearty thanks from the more than seventy conference registrants.

Edmonton, Alberta  
May 1979