

Introduction

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Functional Approaches to Language, Culture and Cognition: Papers in honor of Sydney M. Lamb

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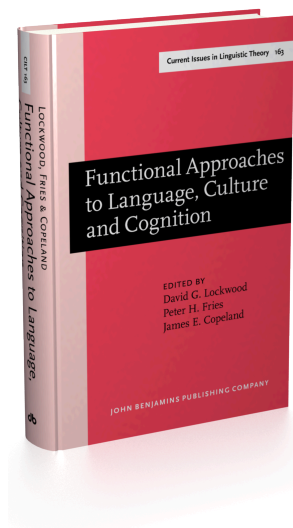
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Introduction

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This book is organized in two sections: Functional Approaches to the Structure of Language: Theory and Practice, and Functional Approaches to the History of Language and Linguistics. Each section is itself divided into three parts. In Section I, papers fall into three groups depending on whether they (a) develop a stratificational model, (b) focus on some related functional model of language, or (c) focus on the description of some particular set of language phenomena. Section II also falls into three parts: (a) Language Change: General Studies, (b) Language Change: Lexicon and Culture, and (c) History of Linguistics and Culture. The ordering of the parts of each section, and the ordering of chapters within each part reflects a general progression from papers which focus on more general and theoretical issues to papers which focus on more detailed issues of description. The linguists who were invited to contribute papers to this volume honoring Sydney Lamb have taken into account Lamb's lifelong interests in essentially these areas of language study, contributing articles representing their own work. A number of the authors, particularly in the first part, cast their discussions in the terms of Lamb's theoretical orientation (see below).

During the Rice University Symposium celebrating the 200th anniversary of Sir William Jones's statement about the genetic source of Sanskrit (cf. Lamb/Mitchell 1991), Robert Austerlitz of Columbia University prefaced his symposium paper with an anecdote and a laudatory comment on Lamb's early work. In remarks that were directed primarily to Lamb's graduate students at Rice, he commented particularly on the reception of Lamb's innovative dissertation on Mono/Monachi and its impact on the descriptive and theoretical thinking of the time. (In the 1950s the Berkeley faculty gave each of their graduate

students a language to work on, and in Syd Lamb's case Mary Haas had assigned Mono, a California Uto-Aztecan language of the Numic branch.)

Although the Monachi grammar was never published as an independent volume, it stood as an exemplary descriptive grammar. This early work substantially advanced the boundaries of linguistic theory and formed the basis for Lamb's subsequent theoretical work on language — an orientation that he called stratificational linguistics for the first two decades. This theoretical orientation slowly moved toward becoming the first American cognitive theory of language, beginning in the early seventies. Lamb's work continues, and his latest book manuscript, *Towards a Cognitive Theory of Language*, fits appropriately under the now-current rubric of Functional Linguistics, reflecting Lamb's constant insistence on the interdependence of language form and function, and his rejection of autonomous formal linguistic structures of any kind. Networks of linguistic relations are instead viewed as ultimately interconnected with and determined by the modalities and processes of human cognition.

Austerlitz's comments were all the more appropriate, since Sydney Lamb, along with his Rice colleague Douglas Mitchell, had conceived and organized the Sir William Jones symposium with its historical focus. And while Lamb is not primarily known for his work in historical linguistics, he made major contributions in that field even as a graduate student. His pioneering article on a system for genetic taxonomy (Lamb 1959), had its beginnings as a graduate student project. The terminology developed there and in subsequent papers (Lamb 1958, 1964a) still furnishes the basis for historical work today. His recent work on historical linguistics is well known (cf. Lamb/Mitchell 1991; and Lamb [forthcoming]).

The notion of Functional Linguistics adopted here to characterize the contributions to this volume is an inclusive one; a *mahayana* approach rather than a *hinayana* one. It contrasts primarily with more exclusively logical/formal approaches that have dominated linguistic practice since the sixties. Functional Linguistics is not 'newer' than formal linguistics; its roots are in fact much older, reaching far back into the history of linguistic speculation. Early in this century German functionalists like Allmann and Boost were discovering the functionalist principles of word order, for which they employed Greek terms like *thema* and *rhema*. In turn the Prague School linguists picked up this interest in functional word order and applied it to languages other than German. Other European schools of linguistics adopted these functional concerns, and for a period of time Halliday's work on Systemic Linguistics was almost synonymous with functional

linguistics (cf. Halliday 1985). Work within Systemic Linguistics continues unabated, maintaining its focus with a yearly International Systemic Functional Congress. Following Halliday's direction, the bulk of the work in the Systemic School is applied, text-oriented, and sociological in its approach.

Functional developments in North America in the last decades since the mid 1960s have in large part taken place in research centers on the West Coast of the United States, hence the rubric "West Coast Functionalism" (cf. for example the work of Bolinger, Chafe, Davis, DuBois, Givón, Haiman, Hopper, Langacker, Talmy, Thompson, van Valin, and many others during the last two decades). Much of that work can be characterized as cognitive in its orientation, constraining discourse by the limits of cognition in the individual discourse participants. Other practitioners prefer to employ the social notion of the participants' negotiation in the production of discourse, and still others tend to reject such a dichotomy altogether. But what unites functional linguists is an implicit belief that language cannot be conceptualized or described separate from its functions in discourse; that autonomy of form or formal categories separate from function is a misguided myth, a myth that ultimately constrains progress in the understanding of language as a dynamic human phenomenon.

Bloomfieldian linguistics was not essentially a functional approach. Its virtual rejection of meaning in language analysis eventually led to its structuralist offspring, generative linguistics, as a natural logical development. But other developments out of Post-Bloomfieldian linguistics included proposals in the early sixties on structural semantics (e.g. Lamb 1964b; and Hockett 1964) that attempted to make semantics a central, rather than a peripheral, concern in linguistic analysis. Such proposals called for semantics to be given its equivalent status in a stratified grammar, conceived of as a network. The idea was to introduce propositional semantic structures as being systematically related to syntactic phenomena (treated by Lamb in the *lexotactics*). Mathematics was in the air and computers were exerting a growing influence on scientific thinking in linguistics. In part because of their narrow, sentence-defined scope, those attempts by Lamb and Hockett were not widely influential (cf. Hockett 1968); but the door had been opened, and Fillmore's Case Grammar, with its propositional input into a generative-transformational syntax, came along toward the end of the decade. Subsequent work on generative grammar, including generative semantics, and the like, maintained the same scope limitations (to sentence-sized pieces of language form), ultimately also with unsatisfying results.

Lamb's formal adaptation of European functionalist concepts started in the sixties when he began a long period of collaboration with Michael Halliday. They first learned of their common interests at the Georgetown Roundtable in 1964, and they continued their discussions at the summer Linguistic Institute at UCLA in 1966. A number of publications have appeared in the literature since that time that emphasize the complementary nature of their work. A symposium at Rice University in 1984 featured, among others, papers by Lamb and Halliday and their co-workers, and focussed on a comparison of systemic analyses with various cognitive analyses of a common oral text captured on video (dubbed the Rhino Text by Michael Halliday). Halliday's functionalist work has influenced Lamb's theoretical work in a number of important ways, and vice-versa. Lamb's relational network notation took important cues from Halliday's systemic diagrams, and Halliday's notions of **given** versus **new** as well as **theme** versus **rheme** greatly influenced Lamb's thinking. Lamb's unpublished papers from the early seventies show an attempt to indicate the contrast between the given information from the new information in a proposition frame by diagramming the new discourse material using bold lines, but not until the 1984 symposium on Text Linguistics did he demonstrate his own notion of how the concepts could be applied to discourse analysis. By this time the notation had been applied by others (even though it was, unfortunately, no longer a widely familiar notation in linguistic practice due to the eclipsing predominance of MIT-based algebraic notations). But the notation's lack of currency among the current generation of MIT-trained linguists should not necessarily be taken as an indictment of its ultimate efficacy and heuristic value. A vast amount of recent work on neuro-linguistics is corroborating Lamb's relational network claims that go all the way back to the 1960s.

There are a substantial number of linguists who find a relational network notation to be the most useful formal way to conceptualize (even if not to diagram) linguistic and cognitive structures (cf. much recent work on PDP, which is in some ways similar). Other linguists quickly reject such representations as reductionist and misleading. Two possible major advantages of the relational network notation are first, that the lines can cross, and second that the notation felicitously allows for both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations to be combined in a single visual array. Because of separate realizational mappings from the semantic/discourse to the syntactic stratum, together with the encoding/decoding notion in processing information through the system, the need for movement rules is avoided, preserving the idea that synchronic linguistic

structure consists of systems of relationships that are activated/created as needed in the production and processing of discourse. Any constraints on discourse are cognitive constraints, as against putative formal linguistic constraints. Thus the data in linguistic analysis includes cognitive as well as language discourse data: the unsaid as well as the said. Social constraints on discourse interaction are always combined with the cognitive constraints of the individual participants, which must also necessarily enable interpersonal negotiation in specific contexts of discourse. What makes the relational network notation potentially problematic is its possible misapplication as a predictor of behavior — a before-the-fact encoder — rather than an after-the-fact analysis of what has or might have occurred in a discourse. The relations are not intended to be seen as stored in memory with hard wiring; discourse conversants attempt to make sense of whatever has occurred. And the constancy of the role of analogy [i.e. metaphor in a broad sense] in the successful accomplishment of discourse can hardly be overemphasized. In a networkist's view relational networks actually generate insights into linguistic phenomena, and networkists are confident that they can, if called upon, adapt the notation to deal with additional powerful insights from other theoretical sources as necessary.

Despite the debate about notations, let it be said that the relational network notation developed by Lamb and his co-workers is not the theory, and the two need to be strictly distinguished. Although both rest on the same reticular metaphor, the one is an attempt to give a practical visual manifestation of some token of the other, and no more. As such, it can be either limiting or enabling or both, depending on the degree to which it is reified in its conceptualization. Lamb steadfastly maintains that the network notion of linguistic structure and the theory that it is based on are potentially so powerful that they will continue to inform work on language, and that their currency will increase as their efficacy becomes more widely known.

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