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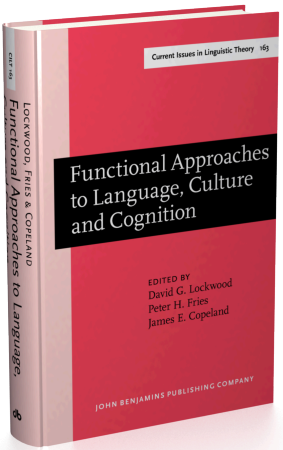


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# Biographical Sketch of Sydney MacDonald Lamb

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This volume honors the career of Sydney MacDonald Lamb, who is currently Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and Cognitive Sciences at Rice University. Lamb was born in Denver, Colorado on May 4, 1929, as the third in a family of four children. His father, Sydney Bishop Lamb, was employed as a highway engineer for the state of Colorado. His mother was Jean MacDonald, whose family had moved directly to Colorado from Scotland around 1910. His childhood and early youth were spent in Denver, where he attended public schools. His academic performance was sufficient that, upon graduating from high school in 1947, he found himself the winner of a scholarship to attend Yale. This was won in a regional competition involving the various states of the Rocky Mountain area.

The breadth of Lamb's interests was reflected already in his undergraduate days. After considering majors in zoology, mathematics, and philosophy, he eventually decided on economics, in which he received a Bachelor of Arts in 1951. It was only in his senior year that he learned, through quite accidental circumstances, that there was such a field as linguistics. This came when he decided to begin the study of Russian. As it happened, this course was directed by the linguist William Cornyn, and his graduate assistant was Alexander Schenker, now a senior Slavic linguist on the Yale faculty. Through these two, he learned of the existence of linguistics, and the field so fascinated him that he decided very late to attend graduate school to study linguistics, specifically Slavic linguistics. At that time, only a few institutions in the United States offered graduate study in both general and Slavic linguistics, and, as it happened, the University of California at Berkeley was the only one of these where admissions for the following fall were still open, so that was where he went.

During his graduate career at Berkeley, he was advised by Professor Murray Emeneau, whose contribution appears in this volume. By the time he wrote his dissertation, Lamb had shifted his focus of interest from Slavic linguistics to general linguistics. So his 1958 "Northfork Mono Grammar" was written under the supervision of the late Professor Mary Haas. It was one of the many studies of the native languages of California and adjacent states that were prepared under her direction.

Two years before the completion of his doctorate, the Berkeley faculty thought highly enough of his work to offer him the post of Instructor in Linguistics, which he held from 1956 to 1958. In the latter year, he was promoted to Assistant Professor. The promotion resulted not only from the completion and successful defense of his dissertation, but from his initiative in securing National Science Foundation funding for a Machine Translation Project at Berkeley. Besides teaching, he served as Director of this project until he left Berkeley in 1964.

Obviously, the work in machine translation involved Lamb in the very new field of computational linguistics, which has remained a continuing interest of his. Beyond this, however, it was during this period that he began to achieve fame as the originator the linguistic theory known as stratificational grammar. The development of this model initially sprang from his dissertation, in which he had advanced the unorthodox idea that languages like Mono (also known as Monachi) required two levels of alternation instead of just one between the morpheme and the phoneme. Instead of treating allomorphic and morphophonemic alternation as alternative ways of describing this relation, he attempted to combine them in such a way that some cases required one, others required the other, and still others required both.

His approach to Machine Translation differed from some others of the period in that he sought to work from explicitly formulated grammars of each language involved. This work therefore provided an ample opportunity for the development and formalization of his ideas on the organization of linguistic structure. The model was first set forth in the 1962 version of his *Outline of Stratificational Grammar*, a publication prepared for students in his classes and sold through the on-campus bookstore in Berkeley. This early version of the stratificational model was used in some Berkeley dissertations of the period, in particular William Shipley's *Maidu Grammar* and M. A. R. Barker's *Klamath Grammar*, both issued in the series University of California Publications in Linguistics in 1964.

Beyond his interest in language description and mechanical translation, some of Lamb's earliest publications reflected an interest in the prehistory and genetic classification of languages — his 1958 article "Linguistic prehistory in the Great Basin" and the 1959 paper "Some proposals for linguistic taxonomy".

In 1964, Lamb joined the Yale linguistics faculty at the instigation of Bernard Bloch, who had seen him as a rising young scholar in the area of linguistic theory. This move had actually taken a couple of years to accomplish. The invitation was extended and accepted in principle in 1962, but Lamb was allowed extra time in order to work out a transition of management for the Machine Translation Project. In the meantime, stratificational theory was receiving greater attention through oral presentations and journal publications. Lamb also found that his ideas converged, at least in part, with the thinking of certain more senior linguists, particularly H. A. Gleason, Jr., who was developing what he later termed "Hartford Stratificationalism", and Charles F. Hockett. After the move to Yale, Lamb was able to interact with Gleason, then at the Hartford Seminary Foundation, on a more regular basis. It was just before this move that he began to develop his relational-network notation (initially based on the systemic network notation of Michael Halliday). So after the move, he realized that Louis Hjelmslev had been right in insisting in the 1940s that linguistic structure consists of relationships alone, rather than objects with relationships among them.

Beginning in 1966, Lamb also secured National Science Foundation funding for his Linguistic Automation Project at Yale. The work of this group grew out of that of the Berkeley project, but it had a broader focus than just Machine Translation. It is interesting to note that its work on the automation of Russian grammar was done with the aid of William Cornyn and Alexander Schenker, the same people who had taught Lamb Russian fifteen years earlier. This project ran until 1970, and it allowed Lamb to provide employment to several Yale graduate students, as well as to two linguists who had been students in his 1965 course in Stratificational Grammar at the Linguistic Institute in Ann Arbor. Peter Reich, now at the University of Toronto, worked for the project while finishing his Michigan doctorate in psychology. Ilah Fleming prepared an annotated bibliography of the stratificational literature, which was published in 1969. She went on to develop her own variant of the stratificational model, which she taught at the International Linguistics Center of the Summer Institute of Linguistics at Dallas before her retirement in 1992.

Yale dissertations written under Lamb's influence and/or direction include those of Adam Makkai (on English idioms), Henry Rogers (on Sherbro phonology and morphology), Yoshihiki Ikegami (on English verbs of motion), David Bennett (on English prepositions), William J. Sullivan (on Russian phonology and morphology), and William M. Christie (on the applications of stratificational theory to language change). All of these are contributors to the present volume. Lamb's own work in this period included in particular the 1966 textbook *Outline of Stratificational Grammar*, which systematically presented the relational-network notation in print.

During his years at Yale, Lamb moved beyond his initial modeling of linguistic structure as simply a system of relationships, and began to explore the relations between his model and what was known about the storage and acquisition of language by the human brain. By the early 1970s he had begun to refer to his model as "Cognitive Linguistics" in preference to "stratificational", though some have also called it "cognitive-stratificational" to distinguish his views from those of others who have independently used the term "cognitive".

Lamb's years at Yale ended in 1977 with his resignation, submitted for personal reasons. He did not immediately seek another academic position. Instead he worked as managing general partner of Semionics Associates, which he had begun as a side business in 1976. Operating from offices in Berkeley, California, this group developed a revolutionary kind of associative memory system for microcomputers, together with associated software.

His return to academics came about as a result of the efforts of James Copeland of Rice University, who had been a student in a Linguistic Institute course Lamb taught at UCLA in 1966. Copeland had long appreciated the value of his academic work, and invited him to serve as Andrew Mellon visiting professor in linguistics at Rice in the fall of 1980. A year later, Lamb was persuaded to return on a regular appointment in linguistics and semiotics, and he worked on organizing a Department of Linguistics and Semiotics at Rice, with a doctoral program added to the formerly interdepartmental undergraduate program. This new department came into being in the spring of 1982, with Lamb as its chairman. He continued to serve in that office until 1988. The inauguration of the department was celebrated by an international symposium on issues in linguistics and semiotics in March of 1982. Various other symposia on specific topics have continued as a fairly regular feature of the Rice program.

Among the several dissertations Lamb has directed at Rice are those of three contributors to the present volume: Chang-In Lee (1988), Cynthia Ford

Meyer (1991), and Timothy Pulju (1995). In recent years, Lamb has organized an interdepartmental program in Cognitive Sciences at Rice, and he served as Director of this program until his retirement in 1998.

Ever since its founding in 1974, Lamb has regularly attended meetings of the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States. He served as a member of its Board of Directors in the 1976–1979 period, then as Vice President in 1982–1983, and President in 1983–1984. In 1995 he began a term as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Association. In this role he has been attempting to attract to the organization such groups as functional linguists, neurolinguists, and those interested in long-range comparative linguistics.

Lamb has been active in several other endeavors besides linguistics and related academic fields. These include membership in the Houston Philosophical Society (he was its president in 1992–1993), and in the Houston Folklore and Music Society (he was its president in 1997–1998). In connection with the latter interest, he has long been singing to the accompaniment of his own guitar as a way of entertaining students and friends. Since 1993, he has regularly entertained members of LACUS with his songs (some of them his own compositions) as a part of the organization's Annual Presidential Banquet. Billed as "The Singing Professor", he has also sung at some local clubs in Houston and in Berkeley, California.

While he has not had many book-length publications, the ideas of Sydney Lamb have made very important contributions to the linguistic literature over the past three decades. These ideas have often proven to be ahead of their time, and not all of those whose later thinking has approached his earlier ideas have even been aware that he preceded them along the same path, The writings of many contributors to this volume, among others, however, are full of references to this work, and these show the obvious importance of his personal influences over his current and former students, and colleagues. And surely the author of this sketch is not the only one whose career in linguistics has been profoundly enriched by Lamb's teachings.