

# Preface. Linguistics at Rice University: The first two decades

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**New Directions in Linguistics and Semiotics**

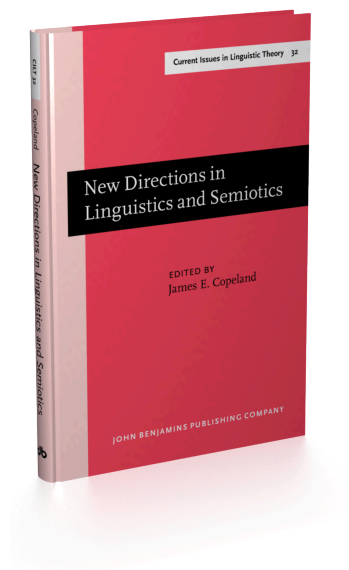
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## P R E F A C E

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# Linguistics at Rice University

## The First Two Decades

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James E. Copeland

The symposium on new directions in linguistics and semiotics that took place in Houston, Texas, on March 18–20, 1982, was held to celebrate the inauguration of the new Department of Linguistics and Semiotics at Rice University and its new doctoral program in linguistics. The symposium also marked the return of Sydney M. Lamb to full-time academic life after four years in the computer industry. The new department had grown out of an interdepartmental linguistics program, and the event brought to fruition almost two decades of effort by the linguistics faculty at Rice. This preface is thus an appropriate place to record some of the events in the short history of linguistics at Rice that led to the establishment of the Department of Linguistics and Semiotics, along with an expression of how the newest developments fit in.

The first course in linguistics to be offered at Rice was taught in the Department of German by Earl Douglas Mitchell, who was at Rice briefly in the early 1960s. In 1965 Robert S. Cox introduced a course on syntax in the Department of English, and in the same year Pardie Lowe, Jr., offered an introduction to general linguistics in the German department. I came to Rice in 1966 for the purpose of developing a program in linguistics, and that potential attracted a number of linguists to Rice during the latter half of the decade.

Work on the proposed linguistics curriculum began in earnest in the fall of 1966. A core curriculum was designed with the participation of Edward Norbeck, acting dean of humanities and social sciences. James

A. Castañeda, chairman of the Department of Classics, Russian, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, also took part in the planning. New faculty members were recruited in several departments: Roy G. Jones was appointed in 1967 in Russian (linguistics), and Hector Urrutibéheity was appointed in Spanish (Romance linguistics). During the same year an ad hoc linguistics committee was formed, with James E. Copeland, Robert S. Cox, Roy G. Jones, and Hector Urrutibéheity as its members. Working together with the new dean of humanities and social sciences, Virgil W. Topazio, the committee presented a proposal to President Kenneth Pitzer in the fall of 1967. The B.A. program was approved by the faculty and became operative in 1968, but courses had been listed in the annual catalogue under a separate linguistics heading since 1966. Philip W. Davis joined the linguistics faculty in 1969, and Stephen A. Tyler was appointed to a joint position in linguistics and anthropology in 1970. With the exception of Philip Davis, all incoming faculty members received appointments that were administered in existing departments. Anticipating the establishment of a Department of Linguistics in 1969, the administration created a position in general linguistics and appointed Philip Davis directly under the office of the dean of humanities and social sciences as a temporary measure. But a new administration and other unforeseen developments in the late 1960s and the early 1970s were to postpone the emergence of a Department of Linguistics for another decade, and Davis's position was transferred to the Department of Anthropology for administrative expedience.

From its inception the linguistics program at Rice had been interdisciplinary, both in the design and administration of its curriculum and in the conduct of research. From 1968 until 1982 the program continued to be administered by the Linguistics Committee, with representation from the departments of anthropology, German and Russian, philosophy, Spanish and Portuguese, and sometimes others. The B.A. program in linguistics was consistent with the size and quality of Rice University and its highly select undergraduate student body. In addition, graduate programs in anthropology, German, and Spanish allowed concentration in linguistics. Some forty graduate degrees (*de facto* degrees in linguistics) were awarded in those programs during the period under review.

The interests of the Rice faculty have, over the years, extended to a wide variety of topics ranging from the study of specific languages to

work that integrates such studies within an overall conception of the nature of language. Research activity is characterized by a view that the study of language cannot successfully be abstracted from the context of its use by actual speakers. Focusing on language in this way necessarily forces the investigator to look beyond the scope of the sentence; and this wider focus has become a dominant theme of linguistics at Rice, supported by the belief that language can be fully understood only within the broader compass of cognitive studies. Linguistics in this view is not seen as simply drawing upon the cognitive sciences for instruction and paradigms, but rather as actively contributing to cognitive studies and promoting a more integrated conception of humankind. Recognizing that this path in the pursuit of knowledge about language is innovative and broad, the new department is determined that there will be at Rice no narrowly doctrinaire pronouncements to further shape research and teaching activities. The products of this catholic view seem to be durable, and they will make our conceptualization more precise but will not narrow or constrain its purview.

In the fall of 1978 Sydney Lamb was invited to give two lectures at Rice: one on computer architecture and one on linguistics. These lectures generated interest from computer science as well as from linguistics. Then in the spring of 1979 Lamb accepted an appointment as adjunct professor of linguistics and computer science at Rice, intending at that time to remain active in Semionics Laboratories of Orinda, California, while also participating in symposia and other academic endeavors at Rice. In the fall of 1980 Rice University brought him to its teaching faculty as Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology. The linguistics program at Rice and its possibilities attracted Lamb while he was in Houston, and he was finally at a point in his career where he could again consider a permanent academic appointment in linguistics.

Lamb's perception of language is closely congruent with that of the linguistics faculty at Rice. In his professional career, Lamb has argued consistently for the broader semiotic view. His linguistic model, often called *stratificational* or *cognitive-stratificational* linguistics, together with related theories like Halliday's systemic linguistics, stands as a prominent alternative to the narrowness of the dominant metalanguage of the 1960s and 1970s. Of particular interest at Rice was Lamb's extension of his work in linguistics to practical applications in computer science.

The concerted efforts of the Linguistics Committee, the active support of Dean Virgil Topazio, and the vision and advocacy of Allen Matusow, incoming dean of the newly established School of Humanities, resulted in the creation of a permanent position for Lamb in 1981, and he accepted an appointment as professor of linguistics and semiotics. Work had already begun on designing a graduate program in general linguistics, and efforts were now continued towards the establishment of a new department of linguistics to administer it. Meanwhile Professor Earl Douglas Mitchell had been recruited and appointed to the linguistics faculty, and Richard E. Grandy, Robert Lane Kauffmann, and Wesley A. Morris had joined the Linguistics Committee from inside the university faculty.

With the establishment of the new Department of Linguistics and Semiotics by President Norman T. Hackerman in the spring of 1982, chaired by Sydney M. Lamb, a major milestone in the linguistics program at Rice had been reached; new goals had been set, and new directions were being sought. Plans were laid for the inauguration of the new department. The event was to be marked by a symposium on the theme, "New Directions in Linguistics and Semiotics." The symposium was intended to focus on the state of linguistics in its recent past, the current status and recent history of linguistics and semiotics, neglected opportunities, and recommendations to the new department on directions that should be taken in the period immediately ahead.

Participants included Harold Conklin, Yale University; Charles Fillmore, University of California, Berkeley; Mary R. Haas, University of California, Berkeley; M. A. K. Halliday, University of Sydney, Australia; Charles F. Hockett, Cornell University; Ilse Lehist, Ohio State University; Winfred P. Lehmann, University of Texas at Austin; Robert Longacre, University of Texas at Arlington and Summer Institute of Linguistics; Donald Preziosi, State University of New York, Binghamton, and Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts; John Robert Ross, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Thomas A. Sebeok, Indiana University; Michael Silverstein, University of Chicago; Sebastian Shaumyan, Yale University; and Edward Stankiewicz, Yale University. In addition to these speakers, six scholars were invited to participate as official discussants of the papers, one for each of the six sessions of the symposium. The discussants were Peter Fries, Central Michigan University; David Lockwood, Michigan State University; Adam Makkai, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle; Julius Purczinsky, Hunter College; Peter Reich,

University of Toronto; and William Sullivan, Florida State University.<sup>1</sup> Section chairmen were Sydney Lamb, Philip Davis, Hector Urrutibéheity, Douglas Mitchell, Stephen Tyler, and James Copeland, all from the Rice University linguistics faculty.

In his letter of invitation to the participants, Sydney Lamb included a copy of his 1981 paper, "The Aims of Linguistics" (the introduction to this volume). This ecumenical statement, together with his opening remarks, set the tone of the symposium. As the reader will see, the papers in this volume sparkle with a new optimism. Most of the papers delivered at the symposium appear here; the three that do not are absent only because of the demands of our publication schedule. The order of the papers reflects, by and large, the original organization of the sessions in the symposium.

The momentum provided by these events continues at Rice University. The new graduate program is active, and new research activities are underway. In the spring of 1984, Charles F. Hockett will be linguist-in-residence at Rice for three weeks and will deliver a series of lectures tentatively titled "Rebuilding Linguistics." Additional symposia are being planned for the future. We are looking forward to further decades of linguistics and semiotics at Rice with new directions, new relevance, and renewed humanistic applications and concerns.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A word of special thanks is due here to the most gracious of hosts, Professor Earl Douglas Mitchell, for his generous support of the symposium. The elegance and informal warmth of his hospitality and of the events that he created for us during the four days of activities greatly enhanced our enjoyment and fostered the spirit of fraternity that dominated the symposium.

#### NOTE

1. The introductory notes to each section reflect the comments submitted by these discussants after the symposium for inclusion in this volume.