

Preface

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Linguistics and Philosophy: Festschrift for Rulon S. Wells

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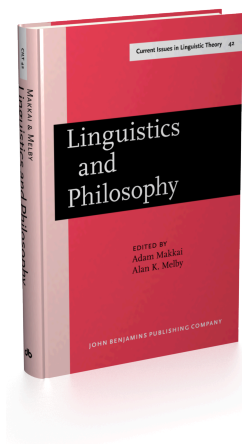
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PREFACE BY THE EDITORS

Rulon S(eymour) Wells III was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on April 30, 1919, the son of a Mormon family of pioneer stock. He was graduated from the University of Utah with a B.A. degree in philosophy in 1939.

After moving to the East Coast, he received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University in 1942. His dissertation director was Willard van Orman Quine. His topic was "The Correspondence of Language to Fact". In 1945 Rulon married the former Miss Virginia Halcomb Bennett; they have two sons, Seymour and David.

From 1942 to 1945 Rulon was employed at the University of Pennsylvania, first teaching Bengali for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) and then Japanese for the Office of Strategic Services. In the summer of 1945 he accepted an invitation from Bernard Bloch, Chairman of Linguistics and editor of *Language*, to assist him in teaching Japanese for the ASTP at Yale, but this engagement terminated not long after the end of the war with Japan. He had studied Sanskrit under W. Norman Brown at Pennsylvania and continued at Yale under Franklin Edgerton; and the good offices of Professor Edgerton put him in touch with F. S. C. Northrop and the Philosophy Department. He was appointed instructor in Philosophy in 1946, becoming assistant professor in 1948.

In 1955-56, when he was made tenured associate professor, Philosophy also decided to share him with the Linguistics department. In 1962, due to his already formidable international reputation, he was made full professor in both departments.

He won the Bechtel Prize at Harvard University in 1940-41 and in 1941-42. In 1944-46 he was a Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies. In 1951-52 he was a Guggenheim & Morse Fellow. He held the prestigious Mahlon Powell lectureship at Indiana University in 1967. He is a member of the American Philosophical Association, the Linguistic Society of America (President in 1976), and the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States. We will not go into his publications here as a separate section is

reserved in order to present his total publication list to date.

So much for the external history of the life of the subject of the present *Festschrift*.

But as all external histories, retrievable from various *Who's Who*-type publications, this external history must be greatly expanded by the internal history of Rulon, the man, teacher, scholar, instigator of ideas, and friend.

Perhaps the most striking fact of his life is that during the height of the Bloomfieldian structuralist period, when "meaning" was a highly suspicious, even a dangerous term, Rulon pioneered semantically oriented research not only in his own work but encouraged it in the work of his students as well. In true peripatetic fashion, clad with his omnipresent scarfs against the cold winds of New Haven, he would walk with students asking him questions from the Hall of Graduate Studies to his office in Davenport College, the York Restaurant, or George and Harry's. He would gladly accept the invitation of a graduate student and spend eight to ten hours discussing some intriguing topic of a dissertation in progress, even if it meant missing his dinner. When most graduate thesis supervisors at Yale were more or less neatly categorizable within their pigeon holes of specialization, Rulon would always have a number of bibliography slips in various pockets (once somebody counted fourteen in one lecture) that would lead the seeker towards Carnap and symbolic logic if that was what was missing in the student's background, or towards Aristotle and Peirce if that seemed more necessary. He taught linguists how to think philosophically and he pointed out to philosophers what linguistics had done for *their* discipline.

He predicted in the early sixties that the discipline of linguistics would move significantly in the direction of Transformational-Generative Grammar. His interest in syntax, we must remember, goes back to "Immediate Constituents" published in *Language* in 1947. His breadth of vision allowed him, nevertheless, not only to tolerate but to encourage the first stratificational dissertation to be written at Yale under his own supervision in 1964-65, the height of the TGG wave in the USA.

When he taught Linguistics at Yale (to undergraduates and graduate students), Rulon inculcated in his students a desire to read in the field freely and with informed criticism rather than being labeled early as a follower of "x", "y", or "z". His academic attitude, in short, was characterized by humanism and tolerance in an age when these virtues were conspicuously lacking in too many others. We learned from him as early as 1960 that semantics and syntax could be studied *both* independently, *and* in conjunction with one another.

This book, which was originally conceived in 1979 when Rulon turned 60, was long in the making and goes to press only shortly after his 66th birthday. Some contributors rewrote earlier versions in the desire to reach perfection--clearly an unrealistic goal in anyone's lifetime, but the desire was there all the way from Port Harcourt, Nigeria to Provo, Utah and many points in between.

The two of us, having worked with this book, represent, in a sense, the two poles in the life and career of Rulon S. Wells: one of us coming from Europe and having studied at Yale, the other a computational linguist interested in formal theory and the computer, coming from the place of Rulon's youth, Salt Lake City, Utah. We wish him good health and many more productive years both as a teacher and scholar.

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