

JOHN LYONS

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1973

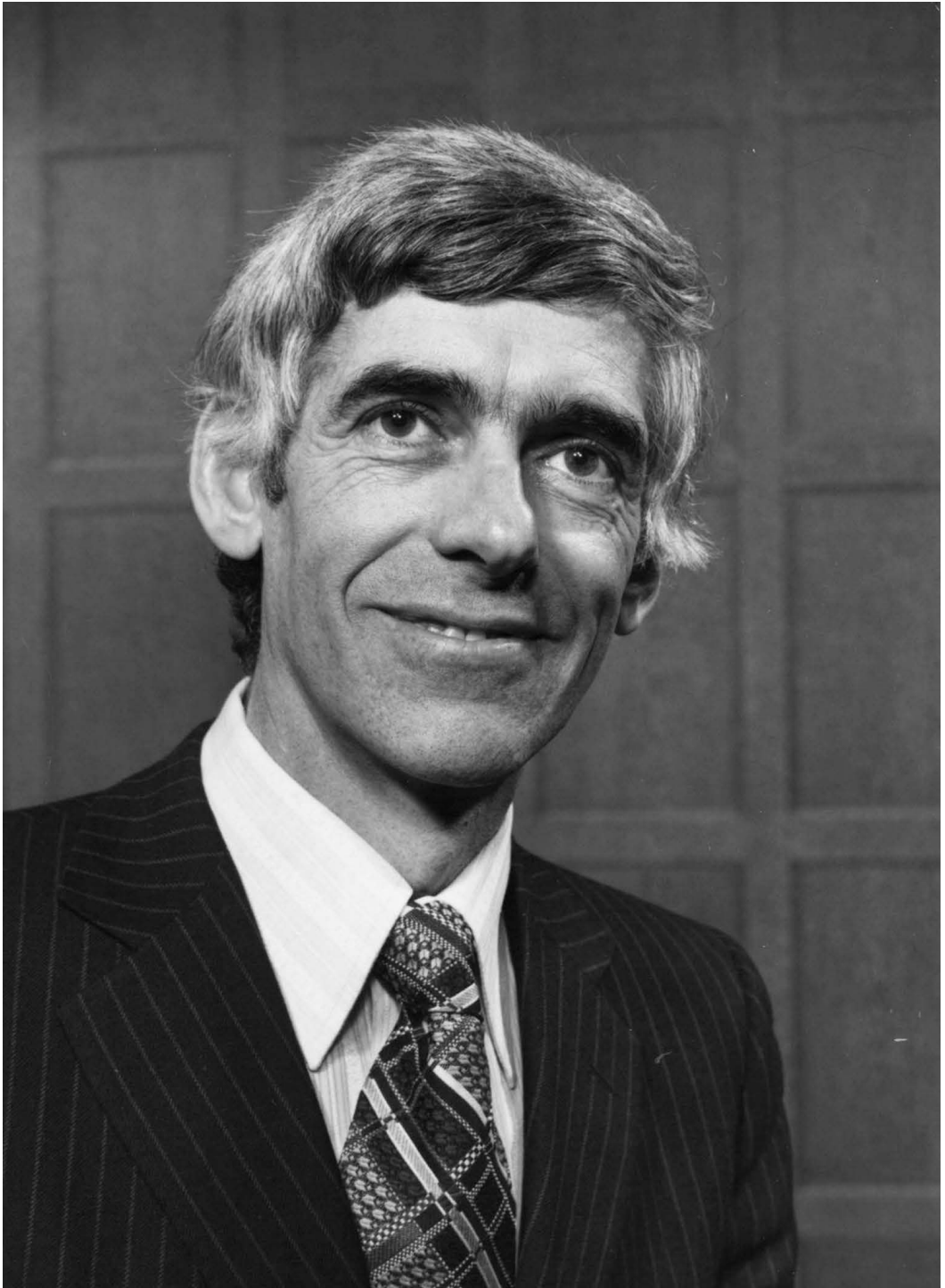
by

EVE V. CLARK

RUTH KEMPSON

Fellow of the Academy

Sir John Lyons was among the first twentieth-century theoretical linguists to focus on semantics, and he rapidly gained a reputation as a major semanticist. He taught successively at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), at Cambridge with the first named Lectureship in Linguistics, then took up the Chair of General Linguistics at Edinburgh before moving to Sussex University. In 1984 he became Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. In his research, he emphasised the subjectivity of language against theoretical orthodoxy, was an inspiring teacher and a significant supporter of junior researchers. His book *Semantics* remains a major reference work.



JOHN LYONS

Professor John Lyons FBA, Sir John Lyons as he became, was among the first theoretical linguists in the blossoming of post-Second World War theoretical linguistics to focus on semantics, emerging as one of the leading semanticists of the 1960s and 1970s. After serving as Lecturer in Linguistics at Cambridge (1961–4), he was appointed in 1964 to the Chair of General Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh at the young age of 32. In 1976, he moved to the University of Sussex to fill the new Chair of Linguistics there, and in 1984, as his last academic position, became Master of Trinity Hall in Cambridge. He retired in 2000. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1973, and received honorary degrees from the Université Catholique de Louvain, the University of Reading, the University of Antwerp, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Sussex. He was also an honorary member of the Linguistic Society of America. He was knighted for his services to linguistics in 1987. In 2016 he was awarded the Neil and Saras Smith Medal for Linguistics by the British Academy ‘for his outstanding lifetime contribution to the field of linguistics’.

Background, SOAS, Cambridge and Indiana

John Lyons was brought up and remained an active Catholic throughout his life. He came from a poor Irish family, his parents having emigrated from Ireland, his mother having been a domestic servant, his father an unskilled labourer. Growing up during the Second World War, he recalled living on a council estate close to the heavily bombed Salford docks, so having to spend nights in a bomb shelter in the garden and walking to school past scenes of much destruction. Though his life would be transformed subsequently, this aspect of his life was not totally unknown, as Lyons wasn't shy about revealing the hurdles to be overcome with such a background if he thought it would help others to know. In particular he reported that, as Master of Trinity Hall giving the leading speech at the college Matriculation Dinner, he would always make a point of talking about his working-class origins and how thoroughly overwhelmed he had felt at the outset of his life as a Cambridge undergraduate, as a means of reassuring those who might need to see the transformative effect that student life at Cambridge can have.

Lyons' school education was initially at St Anne's Catholic School, Stretford, and then, with a scholarship following the 11-plus exams, at St Bede's College, a major Catholic grammar school in Manchester. From there he went to Cambridge on a scholarship as a student at Christ's College where he obtained a first-class degree in Classics in 1954. There he studied not only Greek and Latin, literature and history, but also comparative philology, which exposed him to Sanskrit and Indo-Iranian.

After his degree, he did a two-year spell of national service in the navy, where he was assigned to an intensive Russian course. He returned to Cambridge in 1956 and embarked on a PhD in the broad area of semantics, at that time a field almost untouched in British linguistics. His thesis was published as *Structural Semantics: an Analysis of Part of the Vocabulary of Plato* (1963). He carried out this research initially under the supervision of Professor Sidney Allen at Cambridge, under whose influence his eclecticism was initially fostered by his being directed to read not only the relevant major articles by J. R. Firth and his followers, but also American work being carried out at that time, notably the early work of Noam Chomsky. Then, upon taking up a lectureship in theoretical linguistics at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) in 1957, soon after Firth's retirement, John Lyons came under the supervision of Robert (Bobby) H. Robins. While there, he was also influenced by Professor C. E. Bazell, who, like Sidney Allen, was among the first in the UK to publicly recognise Chomsky as someone whose work would transform the horizons of theoretical linguistics. Indeed, Bazell got Lyons to write the very first review of Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, published in the journal *Litara* in 1958.

In 1960 Lyons was invited to spend a year at Indiana University, working on a machine translation project directed by Fred Householder. At Indiana, Lyons learnt a good deal about computational linguistics, and also gained valuable experience in teaching structural linguistics. When he returned to the UK as a keen advocate of autonomous linguistics, he left SOAS to take up the first lectureship in linguistics at Cambridge. While there, he went back to Indiana in 1963–4 for a further period, overlapping with Jimmy Thorne and Peter Matthews, to cover Householder's teaching while he was on leave. All three (Lyons, Thorne and Matthews) returned to the UK with a reputation for being 'Chomskyans', an early reputation fostered by Lyons' writing the Fontana Modern Masters textbook on Chomsky (Lyons 1970). Three months after arriving back at Cambridge, Lyons was appointed to the new Chair of General Linguistics at Edinburgh, starting in October 1964.

Edinburgh (1964–76)

With his international profile already beginning to be established, it became clear that John Lyons was not afraid to stand up for what he considered important issues for linguistic theorising. The first display of this came upon his arrival at Edinburgh in 1964. Prior to Lyons' appointment, Michael Halliday had developed the Diploma of Linguistics course, and Halliday's own *systemic grammar*, broadly known among literary and applied linguistics scholars, had become very influential there. Edinburgh had in fact become a haven for those working in systemic grammar to the point where

this framework had been dubbed *Edinburgh Linguistics*, with a number of linguists actively working on it in what were then the Department of English Language and General Linguistics and the well-established independent School of Applied Linguistics. To set out a new approach in his inaugural lecture as Professor and holder of the Chair of General Linguistics, in the new department to be called the Department of General Linguistics, Lyons roundly declared that the Edinburgh profile of linguistics would henceforth be known as 'Linguistics at Edinburgh'. The title of his Inaugural Lecture (1965) said it all: 'The scientific study of language'.

Implicit in John Lyons' insistence on the change of label were three characteristics running through all his scholarly work and teaching. First, throughout his career, he was deeply committed to linguistics as an independent theoretical discipline in its own right. Second, he was equally committed to theoretical pluralism. These two positions in combination led to an almost obsessive insistence that all theoretical terms had to be clearly defined prior to any formal engagement in developing a theoretical model, even at the cost of multiplying terms. This was his opening gambit in everything he wrote, and a trait that all his students, and anyone whose work he reviewed, often benefited from. Third, his eclecticism and detailed knowledge of different approaches reflected the intensely scholarly approach he took to every topic he worked on in linguistics: on the one hand, he strongly encouraged a broad appreciation of different theoretical approaches in the students he taught and supervised, without, on the other hand, allowing them any loss of in-depth rigour in their own analyses. This general pedagogical commitment in the field is particularly well exemplified in his textbook *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*.¹

As part of this commitment to studying the nature of language from a theoretical perspective, Lyons also took into account the relation of linguistics to other disciplines that together, over the years, have come to be characterised as 'cognitive science'. In each institution where he worked, he always gathered around him a cross-disciplinary group in order to develop broader intellectual horizons, without the dogmatic insularity that was fast becoming characteristic of linguistic politics, particularly in the US. At Edinburgh, he set up a cross-disciplinary workshop that attracted philosophers and linguists including Jimmy Thorne, Kit Fine and Barry Richards, all from the Department of Epistemics, together with visitors such as Adrienne Lehrer (a visiting Fulbright Scholar) and Fritz Newmeyer, thus enabling his graduate student community to benefit from continuing exposure to a range of views and opinions, a group that established the seeds for what eventually became the world-famous Edinburgh Cognitive Science Centre. He also encouraged close ties with the Department of Psychology, especially with his colleagues Margaret Donaldson and Roger J. Wales.

¹ John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

The broad range of thesis topics for which he was supervisor bears witness to the scope of his professional interests, with many of his students going on to successful professional linguistic careers with research on such topics as first-language acquisition, historical syntax, Russian tense, phonology, sociolinguistics, semantic fields, literal meaning and noun and numeral classifiers, to mention just a few. Finally, he served as the representative for linguistics for the British Academy and the Social Sciences Research Council to the European Science Foundation, where he was particularly involved with the project on adult second-language learning at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, led by Professor W. J. M. Levelt and Dr Clive Perdue.²

On a more personal note, following the pattern already being developed in the SOAS Linguistics department, Lyons insisted to his Edinburgh colleagues that their own linguistics community should be broadly representative of the field, that all students should be taught different approaches to linguistics, introducing them to a range of theories instead of drawing them into the cult of a single inward-looking approach, and that all students should expect to be exposed to a broad array of language data. So, as Keith Brown recalls, his young lecturers were set the task of teaching students the structuralist theory known as Glossematics advocated by the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev for one term, Kenneth Pike's theory of Tagmemics for another and so on.³ Moreover, lecturers had to take turns teaching topics such as semantics, syntax, morphology and phonology. Lyons himself was a demanding teacher, sometimes hard to keep up with in his lectures on semantics: at the board, he would pace to and fro, with his right hand writing up critical points, then almost immediately erasing them with his left hand. Note-taking during his classes was something of a marathon.

Apart from the Edinburgh Diploma course, there was a Language Circle where Lyons' students and young lecturers were asked to lead seminars on the language they were studying. During his time at Edinburgh, Lyons also oversaw the introduction of combined Honours degrees for undergraduates, at that time exceptional in the UK, and so introduced a radical broadening of undergraduate studies. And, further testimony to his deep commitment not only to theoretical reflection but also to the study of languages, he urged his students to include detailed data in their theses on the grounds that theories are ephemeral whereas clear sets of data always remain of interest and can be re-analysed.

²C. Perdue, *Adult Language Acquisition: Cross-Linguistic Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³L. Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. F. J. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); R. Brend and K. L. Pike, *Tagmemics*, vol. 1: *Aspects of the Field* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

Lyons' commitment to his graduate students was profound, involving detailed stage-by-stage textual commentary as their work developed, with a rich ability to point them to relevant, often obscure, work in the literature (a pattern in the tradition of his role model C. E. Bazell, a very intense journal reader with a wealth of references that he always passed on to his students, as both authors of this article fondly note). Lyons would ask Eve Clark, for example, in very small handwriting, at the top of the first page of a draft thesis chapter, 'have you read...' with an arrow to the back of the page, where he proceeded to give a detailed list of references that might stretch over the backs of the next three pages. This further reading in itself provided his students with an extensive education in linguistics.

Lyons was fiercely supportive of the students he tutored and nurtured as graduate students, and sustained his support of them over the years, enabling them to consolidate their teaching and research careers through help in securing funding for their work, and so, for example, enabling them to attend Summer Linguistics Institutes in the US, to teach graduate and research workshops and to present their research at meetings of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain. He stayed in touch over the years, keeping track of what his ex-students were doing in the field. In one email (in December 2005) to Eve Clark, he wrote:

One of the things I am doing at the moment and trying to finish by Christmas is the official British Academy obituary Memoir for my mentor and patron, Sidney Allen (his work was not in your field, but you may know of him). I was his first PhD student. As I write to you today, Eve, I cannot but recall that you were not my first PhD student—that was Erik Fudge—but one of the first (second? third?)—it creates a very special bond and (as Sidney Allen took a pride in my academic success, so I have always done in yours). As you will recall, I supervised you jointly with Roger Wales and, in due course, examined your thesis (if my memory is correct) with Michael Halliday. Those were the days—but I must not get too maudlin and sentimental!

Finally, during his time at Edinburgh, Lyons was a founding member and the first editor (1965–9) of the *Journal of Linguistics*, still a thriving and prestigious linguistics journal.

Sussex (1976–84)

In 1976 John Lyons moved south to Sussex, where the university had already established a cognitive science programme nested within its School-based system, with one lectureship in Linguistics (held by Gerald Gazdar). This gave him grounds (in the event, false) for hoping that his Chair there would not impose on him the administrative burdens that were becoming too great at Edinburgh, and that at Sussex

he would be able to develop a theoretically diverse set of programmes under the broad umbrella of cognitive science. He stayed at Sussex for eight years and continued his pattern of nurturing cross-disciplinary links, in particular between Linguistics and Anthropology. He also added to the array of combined honours degrees that Sussex was developing; and he continued to attract good students.

However, his tenure at Sussex became less happy in that, having been made Dean of the School of Social Sciences in 1980, he was shortly thereafter appointed Pro-Vice Chancellor, and, within days, became embroiled in what was 'a gang of four' that had to implement the severe (18 per cent) cost-cutting exercise to university budgets of that period. As Lyons reported,⁴ the first meeting presenting the proposed cuts 'was my baptism of fire'. Nonetheless, the Anthropology–Linguistics workshops continued and, despite heated arguments with some of his colleagues, he managed to protect the four-person Linguistics group (himself, Gerald Gazdar, Richard Coates and Margaret Deuchar), and remained very supportive of the junior members of his group (Coates and Deuchar), largely protecting them from the turmoil at Sussex. With his continuing support, they went on to have successful academic careers.

Cambridge (1984–2000)

In 1984, John Lyons relinquished his role as Pro-Vice Chancellor at Sussex and went to Cambridge to become the Master of Trinity Hall. Sadly, shortly after his arrival at Trinity Hall, he was diagnosed with cancer, which led to a long period of therapy treatments, but he never allowed these to interfere with his duties as Master, a tribute to his unswerving determination always to do what he took on, properly and to the limit: he never missed a single Governing Body meeting of the college, and never imposed on the college any need to bend its administrative habits to accommodate their at-times fragile Master. Historically, Trinity Hall had a strong connection with the church of Edward King and Martyr, a church famous for its strong support of the Reformation and a place where radicals such as Hugh Latimer felt safe to teach. The church now has a strong eucharistic tradition, and during Lyons' period as Master there was a putative plan to cease financial support of the church. At the time, Lyons much enjoyed playing an active role in getting this plan turned down, deriving some pleasure at the irony of this church having an anti-Catholic history. While at Cambridge, he was always strongly committed to college activities, especially as his health recovered. Towards the end of his term as Master, he participated in the Milestone Lectures that celebrated the 650th anniversary of Trinity Hall.

⁴'John Lyons', in K. Brown and V. Law (eds.), *Linguistics in Britain: Personal Histories*, Publications of the Philological Society 36 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 170–99.

Intellectual contributions

On the intellectual front, although John Lyons became prominent on his return from the US for being an advocate of Chomskyan autonomous linguistics, he remained at heart a European structuralist in a world that was becoming overwhelmed with demands for formal rigour as a means of supposedly ensuring substantive forms of explanation, and very rapidly gained a reputation as a major semanticist within the newly flourishing field. As he said in his plenary opening address to the 1990 Georgetown Round Table meeting celebrating forty years of progress in the field, ‘I am an unregenerate structuralist’. All his written work displays an intense insistence on establishing classifications by comparison with other related terms in the system under study. This pervades not only his own work but also his evaluation of others. The preliminary step in any analysis he proposed, indeed the heart of his accounts, characteristically involved a probe of terminology in depth, refining terms successively to yield the precise level of granularity he argued was needed for a given language, in order to get as close as the language would allow in achieving the theoretician’s goal of establishing maximally precise, and hence optimally explanatory, classifications.

This insistence was characteristic of his extremely generous interactions with others in the linguistics community. In holding to such meticulous standards of precision, he could be very critical, but always constructively so. It is with some shyness that Ruth Kempson notes, in his evaluation of contributions to his Festschrift, she fell prey to his sharp tongue in this connection, where he says ‘I would wish to re-formulate the first paragraph (and especially the opening sentence) of Kempson’s chapter and invite her to be rather more explicit than she is about sentences, expressions, denotational (as distinct from referential) ambiguity, etc.’—that stinging ‘etc.’—and yet he ends this paragraph with the conciliatory ‘it is quite possible to reject an author’s premises and yet to accept his or her conclusions’.⁵ Such a rebuke, turned around to be almost a compliment, was characteristic of Lyons’ generosity to so many of us in his linguistic community. It was just such a task that he imposed on Kempson in his serving as her external examiner, with intense probing of definitions for much the greater part of the thesis viva. He later followed this up with page-by-page and paragraph-by-paragraph comments on a manuscript that was to become her *Semantic Theory*,⁶ which had the entirely happy effect of transforming what originally was, no doubt in his view, a cavalier piece into a publishable textbook. Such service must have taken him hours, indeed days, even on the assumption that perhaps in those days he

⁵ John Lyons, ‘Grammar and meaning’, in F. Palmer (ed.), *Grammar and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 234–5.

⁶ R. M. Kempson, *Semantic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

had a secretary. And what is particularly remarkable is that this commitment on his part to helping young colleagues transform their work is reported by others in the community, notably Bernard Comrie, who provided us with a parallel story of his early submission of a textbook draft, which received from Lyons a mass of critical comments and requests for revision; and we can be sure there are many others who would report the same combination of extreme punctiliousness with respect to terminology and academic generosity.

Lyons was a truly notable example of academic generosity to the entire community of working linguists, students—graduate and undergraduate—postdoctoral colleagues, even young lecturers at other institutions to whom he need have felt no professional commitment. Such dedication on his part to constructively supporting others was a striking characteristic of his personality. He was never self-aggrandising, always outgoing and constructive, whether with colleagues, postgraduates, graduates or undergraduates, both while critiquing and taking criticism from them. He was modest, always approachable, always warm-hearted. As many colleagues have been reporting to the authors of this memoir, each and every one of us, irrespective of the stage of enquiry into language at which we were lucky enough to interact with him, was treated in a kindly manner. It was an honour to have been trained by him.

Despite public dedication to a Chomskyan methodology of separating competence (capacity for language) and performance (actual usage of language), he was a theoretical pluralist, at heart remaining focused on European structuralism, and he had a fierce commitment to seeing individual expressions in terms of their relatedness to other concepts within the system of a particular language. Over the years, with the politics of theoretical linguistics becoming ever more dogmatic, Firth's influence on his work, dating from his time at SOAS, emerged more and more strongly. He developed an increasing interest in the context-relativity of utterance content—usually treated as peripheral in the 1970s in formal models of semantics—and he recognised, early on, the extent to which speaker–hearer inter-relations are encoded in language, something not addressed at all in linguistic models at the time.

Deixis and subjectivity

One major topic in John Lyons' work, central to the inter-relations between speaker and addressee, was subjectivity and its attendant deixis.⁷ He distinguished carefully

⁷See especially his 'Existence, location, possession and transitivity', *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics*, 52 (1968), 495–504; 'Deixis as the source of reference', in E. L. Keenan (ed.), *Formal Semantics of Natural Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 61–83; *Semantics*,

between *utterances* ('la parole' or language as used) and *sentences* ('la langue', or the material analysed by linguists).⁸ On numerous occasions, he critically pointed out that a Cartesian or logic-based linguistics such as that being developed in the US—with a semantics focused on propositions and their truth-values—omitted consideration of those aspects of language that reflect a speaker's attitudes, beliefs and choices of speech act. In particular, he focused on the pronouns *I* and *you*, and their special status with respect to speaker and addressee, given that there is no particular referent for such pronouns as there is for referring expressions. In this, he followed in the steps of such European linguists as Karl Bühler and Emile Benveniste,⁹ who viewed deixis in language as centred on the (current) speaker, as well as Bertrand Russell,¹⁰ who held that there were three functions for language: indicating facts (propositions), expressing the psychological state of the speaker and modifying the psychological state of the addressee, with the latter two comprising subjectivity.

Though this subjectivity is self-evident in the use of personal pronouns, in particular *I* and *you*, its influence is much more pervasive and subtle than merely the options that a language provides for picking out the speaker and addressee or hearer. Not only does the *I* change with each turn at talk, but whoever is *I* takes into account what the *you* referred to already knows, and so, in today's terms, common ground is accumulated throughout a conversational exchange.

Subjectivity also plays a role in spatial deixis (*here, there*), demonstrative deixis (*this/these, that/those*), and directional deixis in spatial motion (*come, go, bring, take*), as well as being central to uses of tense (another deictic category) and certain uses of modality. And in all these cases, such subjectivity is sensitive to dependency on the context within which it is used, with a charming and subtle case provided at a recent workshop in which the visiting speaker was asked at the end of her presentation, 'Will you be coming to next year's meeting?'—notably to be at a wholly different site, and maybe held only electronically, but at a future time, so the use of *come* here not only depended on the speaker being the deictic centre but combined this notion with the dimension given by the future tense of the verb, with *will*.

2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); 'Deixis and anaphora', in T. Myers (ed.), *The Development of Conversation and Discourse* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1979), pp. 88–103; *Language, Meaning and Context* (London: Fontana Press, 1981); 'Deixis and subjectivity: loquor, ergo sum?', in R. J. Jarvella and W. Klein (eds.), *Speech, Place, and Action: Studies in Deixis and Related Topics* (New York: Wiley, 1982), pp. 101–24.

⁸ Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*.

⁹ K. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie* (Jena: Fischer, 1934); E. Benveniste, 'Catégories de pensée et catégories de langue', *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, 13 (1958), 419–29; E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

¹⁰ B. Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940).

Another aspect of deixis that Lyons focused on is the relation between deixis and definite reference. As he pointed out,¹¹ definite articles typically derive historically from deictic demonstratives and appear in a number of languages as weaker versions of the latter. He argued that definite reference itself therefore belongs in the realm of deixis, with the definite article in a referring expression ‘pointing’ to the specific referent the speaker has in mind on that occasion and is conveying to the addressee, as in ‘*The dog is under the tree*’.

The fact that the referring expressions ... are comparable in terms of their grammatical structure with deictically referring expressions suggests that their use and function is derivative, and depends upon the prior existence of the mechanisms for deictic reference by means of language. ... deixis is, in general, the source of reference.¹²

As Lyons pointed out, the uniqueness of a reference is always context-dependent. This is as true of personal pronoun uses (*he, she, it, they*), demonstrative uses (*this, that*) and uses of proper names, as of definite referring expressions containing countable nouns combined with a demonstrative or a definite article (*that finch, the woodpecker*). Then, with anaphoric pronoun uses, the deictic information about location is transferred to the temporal dimension of the utterance context, and so locates and tracks the relevant referent in the speaker’s current universe of discourse.

Overall, as Lyons put it, ‘One cannot reduce the speaker’s expression of himself in his utterance to the assertion of a set of propositions’.¹³ This is because what is conveyed in each utterance by the speaker, in addition to one or more propositions, includes the attitudes and beliefs of the current speaker towards that propositional content, plus any evaluation of it on the speaker’s part; and, as the further list of areas of meaning in which subjectivity plays a role demonstrates, this phenomenon pervades every aspect of natural language understanding. Yet the centrality of subjectivity was not recognised then; and Lyons was well ahead of his time in insisting that the systemic pervasiveness of subjectivity in language was far more than could be dismissed merely as ‘performance’, hence his linguistic theorising that notions of competence in language should not be restricted to accounting merely for the propositional content and the truth-value of an utterance, despite the awkwardness this creates for the Chomskyan assumption of a competence–performance dichotomy. Echoing the firmness of his inaugural address at Edinburgh is his strong declaration in the closing paragraph of Lyons, in which the final chapter is devoted to subjectivity: ‘It is my conviction that any theory of meaning which fails to account for the

¹¹ Lyons, ‘Deixis as the source of reference’.

¹² Lyons, ‘Deixis as the source of reference’, p. 82.

¹³ Lyons, ‘Deixis and subjectivity: loquor, ergo sum?’, p. 104.

subjectivity of reference deixis or modality in the sense in which subjectivity has been explained in this chapter is condemned to sterility'.¹⁴

This call to linguists to take up his challenge and recognise the limits of their foundational assumptions about language competence and any priority this might have over language performance was at that time largely ignored. But it is striking that, with the rapid increase of interest since that period in modelling the nature of context-dependence in language, linguists have turned increasingly to probing issues such as subjectivity in depth, taking the interactivity between conversational participants as essential to young children's acquisition of language and, more recently, to the challenge of defining formal models of the dynamics of conversational dialogue, all now taken to be essential in furthering our understanding of the interactional nature of language. And we think it would quietly please John to hear how Craig Roberts, Professor Emerita at Ohio State University, as the invited closing speaker of the Workshop on the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse and Dialogue held electronically at Brandeis in July 2020, chose to report her ongoing research on *Indexicality and Perspective* by opening her presentation with a quote from Lyons' 1977 classic two-volume work *Semantics*, some forty-three years after its publication, thereby providing overt witness to the enduring interest of his work for linguists today.

In his closing years as a working linguist, Lyons was not altogether optimistic about ever seeing a more unified field of linguistics. As he reflected in his 1990 Georgetown address:

It may be that some day the dream of a unified science which inspired inter alia Bloomfield, Carnap and Morris will again seem realisable. It does not seem to me today and I for one as I peer into my glass and see but darkly, would not bet on its being realised this side of eternity. Of one thing I am confident as I take a view toward the future: it is that premature reduction of whatever kind, generativist or physicalist, psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic, is detrimental to our subject in its current state of development.

We hope he might take some comfort from this news of 2020 that research on such issues as subjectivity, the interactional nature of language acquisition and the formal modelling of conversational dialogue, all continue apace, having developed out of a period in which he was a front-line contributor.

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¹⁴Lyons, *Language, Meaning and Context*, p. 242.

Michael Garman, Heinz Giegerich, Adrienne Lehrer, Lourdes de León, Peter Matthews, James Rivington, Craige Roberts, Peter Trudgill, Anthony Warner, Max Wheeler and, especially, Nigel Vincent.

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Note on the authors: Eve V. Clark is R. W. Lyman Professor in Humanities, Emerita, and Professor of Linguistics and Symbolic Systems at Stanford University. Ruth Kempson is Professor of Linguistics, Emerita, Philosophy Department, King's College London; she was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989.

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