

## Preface

As the title page indicates, this book is about the development of word meaning. The approach taken to this exceedingly complex problem has been primarily empirical and descriptive. The work to be reported is primarily empirical because its major emphasis lies in the cross-sectional experiments described in Chapters 3 to 5. The systematic developmental trends which reveal themselves in the form of diverging curves constitute the primary message of this book. The work is primarily descriptive because the experiments were designed to provide a fairly detailed picture of *how* the internal lexicon evolves rather than to provide a complete explanation of *why* it evolves. An adequate explanation of the systematic trends reported here would presumably lead to a consideration of the effects of Western culture, particularly its educational habits and its media. This kind of consideration is beyond the scope of the present project.

If such an emphasis on empiricism and description would seem to preclude theory and speculation, then the reader may find this book something of a paradox. Three of the six chapters that follow deal with the theoretical preconceptions that led to the experiments and the theoretical implications that emerged from them. An attempt has been made to suggest why the empirical curves diverge rather than converge, to provide a model of lexical growth that is consistent with the data, to suggest interpretations for certain results that appear somewhat puzzling, and to unify findings from the several experiments by relating them to presumed linguistic habits.

All but one of the experiments reported here were part of my doctoral

dissertation, "The Growth of the Internal Lexicon," completed at Harvard University in 1969 under the supervision of George Miller. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Miller for first engaging my interest in the study of language, for providing continued interest and encouragement and, in general, for being a fine teacher and friend. I would also like to thank the other two members of my thesis committee: Jerome Bruner for first pointing out to me the value of the study of developmental trends as a technique for tapping cognitive processes and for many valuable discussions about the thesis in particular and about development and cognition in general; and Roger Brown, whose excellent book influenced much of my own thinking about lexical growth, for kindly agreeing to read the thesis on short notice and to participate as a member of the committee.

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