Preface

The learning of names for things is regarded as the simplest part of language learning or indeed of any human learning, yet here is a book about it with thirteen chapters. The truth is that whether or not name learning deserves its ranking, it is a surprisingly complicated matter. And much of the complexity has eluded the abundant literature on language learning. Complexity is as much a nuisance as gout, but sometimes just as real and inevitable. Like gout one avoids introducing it to the system, but confronted with it one has no reasonable alternative but to deal with it. So far psychologists have failed to deal with what strikes me as the very real complexities of name learning.

The aspects that seem most neglected may be surprising when just listed: reference, meaning, hierarchical relations among meanings, the grammatical category to which names belong (noun) and its subdivision, proper and common names. One can point to chapters in books or even whole books in psychology that purpose to deal with reference and meaning. Compare them, however, with the classical writings on the philosophy of language since the time of Gottlob Frege and one must be struck by the difference in depth of analysis. Now either the philosophers have been weaving futile

webs (or trying to save us from futile ones) or psychologists have missed something important. After examining the issues I come down on the side of the philosophers, though webs are hardly conspicuous by their absence in the philosophical literature.

On the other hand when they speak of learning, the voice of logicians and philosophers sounds distant. That is pardonable granted the complexity of that which is learned. However, the time has come when we might reasonably hope to give an account of name learning that comes to grips with names as they really are and function. This might be the justification for another book on child language—the ambition to integrate the insights of the philosophy of language with the psychology of language learning, thus enriching psychology and, perhaps, providing a somewhat different perspective on the philosophical issues. The reason for qualifying the philosophical ambition is not merely modesty, but the presence of Wittgenstein in the wings. At any rate I entertain the hope that the logical analysis of names and empirical observations of how they are learned can be mutually improving.

There is surprisingly little literature on how the child learns which words go in which grammatical categories and subcategories. Thus an attempt to throw light on the matter needs no apology.

The book is subtitled *an essay on learning* partly because that is what it is, but partly to suggest that it has a broader relevance in psychology than the psychology of language alone. Its relevance to the theory of learning is obvious. In addition, reference is the contact language makes with the environment; it is the device that enables us to talk about the things we see and touch. Meaning is in some degree the sense we make of that environment; it is to some degree what we have to say about it. Thus the psychology of names relates directly to the conceptual system and to the perceptual one. That is pretty well the core of cognitive psychology.

In fact names relate to so many things that I have had to exclude several topics. I have limited the book to what seem the simplest issues; that is to names for things you could bump into.

After the introductory chapter come four that describe empirical observations aimed at exploring how a child copes with the fact that many different name-like words can be applied to a single object: e.g., *Harry* (the child himself), *you* (a pronoun), *boy* (specific) and *person* (generic).

The second major section of the book (Chapters 6–10) deals with topics that are broadly linguistic. I was guided in my choice

not only by the fundamental nature of the topic, but also by whether or not I could find interesting empirical investigations in the area. Chapter 6, on phonology, was included to parry the conclusion, too readily reached by philosophers of quite diverse schools, that the age-old problem of how to categorize objects is solved for the child by the names he hears them called. Other chapters in the second section can be seen to fit in naturally: the learning of grammatical categories (Chapters 7 and 8), the definite and indefinite articles (Chapter 9), and the plural (Chapter 10).

Truth to tell, even in the linguistic section there is a greater emphasis on semantics than this description suggests. That gives the book a coherence that it might not at first seem to have, since the issues of reference and meaning run through all chapters. Those issues occupy the third section entirely. They have been so placed because they were the most difficult to write and will, I fear, be the most difficult to read. Because of the complexity of the issues, the unfamiliarity to many psychologists of the style of analysis, and the controversial nature of many of my conclusions, I placed them towards the end. The pusillanimous may leave them there and skip to Chapter 13. The daring (and the reckless) will, I hope, find them rewarding, even if they do not always agree. All who read them must recognize that I am not being complex, subtle, or obtuse out of wantonness. The complexities forced themselves on me, and would not go away.

The last chapter is a series of reflections on the implications of the book for developmental psychology. If the book is even vaguely right, there is something radically wrong with the current orthodoxies in child development.

The number of chapters is thirteen but that does not equal the number of years I have worked on them. It has been the most interesting project I have undertaken, and while it has at times been tantalizing, and even downright frustrating, it will, I hope, reveal the vitality and color of cognitive psychology broadly conceived. It brought me into continued contact with the most interesting thing there is, the mind of the growing child.

Several friends read the first draft and made valuable suggestions: Andy Baker, Susan Carey, Michael Corballis, Ray Jackendoff, Terri Nash, David Ostry, Eric Wanner, Rose-Marie Weber, and Steven and Judy Zucker. Sandra Trehub helped with the chapter on phonology, Jeremy Anglin with Chapter 4 on hierarchically related nouns, Janet Strayer with the chapter on personal pronouns,

and Michael Maratsos with the one on the articles. Jeremy Walker and Anil Gupta worked through the issues in reference and meaning with me. Bill Blackburn helped with problems in reference.

Susan Carey and Steve Pinker read the all but final version and suggested many detailed improvements. My publisher, Harry Stanton, is responsible for the present arrangement of chapters.

Nancy Wargny, my student, and I worked for many years on the experimental work.

I owe a very great debt to Jerry Fodor. He read the entire second and third drafts, covering them with searing comments. The book in its present form is, to a great extent, an answer to those comments. Several of the examples, otherwise unacknowledged, are his.

Without these people, to whom I am deeply grateful, the book would either not be or would be quite different. They must, therefore, no matter their views, share the responsibility for it.

An earlier and less complete version of Chapter 2 appeared in *Child Development* by Katz, Baker, and Macnamara (1974). Parts of that version are reproduced here with kind permission of the journal and of the authors. The use of Strayer (1977) in Chapter 3 is by permission of the author. Parts of Chapter 5 are taken from Nancy Wargny's (1976) doctoral thesis, with her generous permission. A much earlier version of Chapters 7 and 8 appeared in Sankoff (1978). Chapter 11 was read as the annual Terry Anders address at Dalhousie University in 1979. And an earlier version of Chapter 12 will appear in a book that is being edited by Palermo and Weimer.