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Finally, I thank Dwight Bolinger, who taught me the important thing: a linguist should attend first to the language and to the various many who use it variously. As will become apparent, I both rely on and quarrel with him in this book, so it is only fitting and necessary that I dedicate it to him.

Norfolk VA, March 1988

Chapter 1

MONOSEMY

On Monosemy
Charles Ruhl
State Univ. New
York Press, pp. 1-24
(1989)

Anyone using a dictionary is accustomed to finding that most words have multiple meanings. This is especially true for the most common words of English: verbs like *come*, *go*, *bring* and *take*, or prepositions like *of*, *to*, *from*, *on*, *in* and *at*. Multiple meaning is so pervasive in dictionaries that it has the force of evident fact; its ubiquity leads us to assume, usually without taking thought, that multiple meaning is in the nature of things, an established reality that we need not and cannot question.

This book takes issue with the ubiquitous fact. I hope to show that many common words of English, such as those noted above, each have only one single general meaning. I argue that many examples of multiple meaning are the result of dubious assumptions about language: assumptions perhaps necessary for the practical work of making dictionaries, but damaging when carried over almost intact into linguistic theories on semantics.

A case in point: one particular shortcoming of dictionaries in a habit of overspecifying, of attributing to words meaning that in part is supplied by the context. I can illustrate this briefly with some data that I will discuss more extensively later. Consider the expression *take off*. Dictionaries treat some combinations of these words as single units, unrelated to the verb *take* and the preposition *off*. One attributed meaning is 'become airborne' (or 'take flight'), sometimes with the additional 'from land or water'. This meaning is inferred from sentences [1] and [2] and perhaps [3]; but what about the others?

- [1] Planes were landing and taking off like clockwork. (Malcom X)
- [2] They heard the grouse take off without ever being quite able to locate its position. (Robert Murphy)
- [3] They [small frogs] move only when actually dispossessed, taking off in a long leap that is almost a flight. (Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings)
- [4] Of course, ability plays a part in whether or not a real tackle-buster will be landed, but if one [fish] does latch on, take off for the horizon, and pop the line, the small loss is well worth the excitement. (Joseph D. Bates, Jr.)
- [5] However, he was unable to hold them [horses] and they took off. (Walter R. Fletcher)
- [6] He gave the cab driver the address of the hotel, and the taxi took off with a lurch. (Bernard Malamud)
- [7] . . . Jones took off at a gallop down the right sideline. (AP)
- [8] We put on our skating shoes, knotted the laces of our regular shoes together and hung them around our necks, got out on the frozen lake, held the sails in front of us, and took off. (Bruce Catton)
- [9] When they [surfers] got out to where the waves were breaking, they swung their boards around and straddled them, waiting for the right moment to take off. (William Murray)

In each of these sentences, *take off* seems to mean that something is in motion; but in [4-9] the motion is horizontal, not vertical as flight in part requires. Does this mean that [1-9] illustrate several different meanings of *take off*? Given that the same words describe all these motions, on what basis can we assume that the horizontal-vertical distinction makes a difference in this expression? These data show that the meaning 'become airborne' is a mistake. *Take off*-motions are neutral between horizontal and vertical directions; giving a separate meaning for flight needlessly divides a unified sense. It is comparable to giving *dog* a separate meaning when it applies to collies. This book will be filled with many demonstrations of this type; later I will show that attributing 'motion' to the expression *take off* is yet another overspecification, comparable to a mistake that gives *dog* a particular meaning for all dogs that have shaggy hair.

However, my chief concern is not with dictionaries, but with linguistics; this book is intended as a contribution to theoretical semantics. Yet dictionaries are crucially important because they are part of our pretheoretical heritage; linguists, like everyone else, have been conditioned by the model of dictionaries to expect words, as a matter of course, to have multiple meanings. We require semantic theories to be much more rigorous and precise than dictionaries; but if dictionaries lead us to expect widespread multiple meaning, our theories are severely compromised right from the start. We then begin with dubious axioms and spread their distorted implications throughout our theories. Keeping in mind that dictionaries have severe limitations (recognized most clearly by

lexicographers themselves), linguists must question not only the specific analyses of dictionaries but their design and purposes as well. My goal here is to test multiple meaning: to argue that its seeming abundance does not represent a fact about human language, but is rather a consequence of mistaken premises.

1.1 MONOSEMIC BIAS

My original inspiration for this book was a remark by Uriel Weinreich regarding *take* (1963: 180):

When we contemplate the varieties of "meanings" which a word like *take* has in English (*take offense*, *take charge*, *take medicine*, *take notice*, *take effect*, etc.), we come to the conclusion that this is a case not of abnormally overdeveloped polysemy of a word, but rather of its semantic near-emptiness.

These comments suggest that *take* has only one highly general meaning. Can such a possibility be taken seriously? Dictionaries provide *take* with many separate definitions, which become little less than chaotic in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1976) [W3]. What theoretical assumptions support the dictionary treatments? Conversely, what theoretical assumptions would support a semantic theory that posits only one meaning for *take*?

We can begin answering these questions with Ullmann's three types of multiple meaning (1957: 114):

1. Several aspects of one sense: SHIFTS IN APPLICATION: e.g., *healthy climate*, *healthy complexion*
2. Several senses of one word: POLYSEMY: e.g., *human head*, *head of department*, *bridgehead*
3. Several words: HOMONYMY: e.g., *sea*, *to see*, *a see*

The distinction between polysemy and homonymy is a commonplace of semantic research, although scholars sometimes loosely use either term as a cover label. In addition, judging an expression idiomatic implies multiple meanings for its constituent words. I will use MULTIPLEPLICITY as a cover term for all of these. Of particular interest in Ullmann's types is Shift. He refers to the "elasticity" of words, their ability to make small adjustments in different contexts without the need for distinct meanings. He gives as an example the noun *wall*:

A simple word like *wall* will have different aspects according to its material (stone, brick, concrete, timber), its functional role (wall of a house, a fortress), and also according to the background and interests of its users (bricklayer, architect, art historian, etc.). All these shades of application are felt as contiguous facets of a coherent whole. . . .

These remarks imply that perception of different meanings does not

necessarily imply that an involved word should be given multiple meanings; there are many shades of red, but we do not parallel them all with separate senses of *red*. In general, human beings can in some perspective count as "the same thing" what in a more discriminating perspective appears as "different things". That is, we have multiple means of interpreting: each particular use of language can be judged in some highly differentiating perspective to be unlike any other use of language. But multiple perspectives are not solely provided by words; a difference of perceived meaning does not automatically require different lexical meaning. A linguistic theory must have ways of determining when multiplicity is inherent in a word, and when it is supplied by other words or even extralinguistically.

A theory requires an associated methodology that specifies a preferred way of making and testing hypotheses. Ullmann gives a pertinent suggestion when he emphasizes that his three types are not fully distinct, but form a continuum; when a word's status is hard to determine, he advises the following (p. 115):

... it may be wise to lay down a golden rule to give the benefit of the doubt, in borderline cases, to the closer of the two alternative connections: to shifts in application against polysemy, and to polysemy against homonymy. Naturally, each case will have to be examined on its own merits, and often there may be no hard-and-fast solution at all.

I infer from this the following methodological implication:

[A] MONOSEMIC BIAS

First Hypothesis: A word has a single meaning.

Second Hypothesis: If a word has more than one meaning, its meanings are related by general rules.

In other words, a researcher's initial efforts are directed toward determining a unitary meaning for a lexical item, trying to attribute apparent variations in meaning to other factors. If such efforts fail, then the researcher tries to discover a means of relating the distinct meanings. If these efforts fail, then there are several words. This approach initially assumes that lexical form and meaning are fully congruent, and that claims of polysemy, homonymy, and idiomatity must be substantiated by detailed study, not merely asserted as intuitive insights. This Monosemic Bias implies a priority of research: a full detailed exploration of a word's variant range before considering its possible paraphrase relationships with other lexical items. For example, it claims (as does Kirsner (1972)) that Postal in his treatment of the verb *remind* (1970) should have first considered a possible unity for all posited meanings for *remind* before attempting to link one of those meanings to other expressions such as *strike as similar*.

Objections to such an approach come readily to mind, even too readily. An approach that initially considers form and meaning to be highly congruent may seem hopelessly naive, especially with the massive evidence of dictionaries to

the contrary. But an initial presumption of monosemy does not question the existence of multiplicity; rather, it implies that current analyses find too much multiplicity too easily, and so provides a means for testing each particular claim. Thus, while I will grant that the noun *orange* is polysemic and the noun *bank* is homonymic, I will show that the verbs *bear* and *hit* are monosemic. Also, while I agree that *white elephant* is an idiom, I will show that *take off*, *hit the beach*, and *break the ice* are not. Even the favorite exemplar, *kick the bucket*, is not an idiom; it relates to other expressions.

Actually, the full-range implausibility of the Monosemic Bias is perhaps its best recommendation. Methodologies can easily become self-confirming, finding only supporting evidence. What begin as hypotheses, to be confirmed as factual, often turn into axioms, yet still treated as fact; language enables us to use the same means either to describe or to dictate. The hypotheses I propose have the virtue of being in direct contrast with some of our most pervasive assurances, and they thus serve as necessary counterbalancing cautions, a check on what we too easily take for granted. Without such an explicit check, current methodologies and assurances are even more naive.¹

1.2 MODULARITY

Because dictionaries try to be as informative as possible, they typically assume that the message of a particular sentence is completely supplied by words. Thus, each word in a sentence must carry as much information as possible, as illustrated above by *take off*. However, if in those sentences *plane*, *grouse*, *frog*, *taxi*, *surfer*, or other words show (directly or indirectly) what kind of motion is involved, *take off* does not have to show it again. In fact, if other information is minimal, as in *It took off*, the expression *take off* by itself cannot provide the details. This is precisely the attribute of any general term: *dog* by itself cannot indicate the size or breed of a dog, but it can be interpreted more specifically when the context occasions it: *the dog tried to pick a fight with a cat twice its size*. Our ability to imagine several possibilities for *It took off* (horizontal or vertical motion, and others) does not require us to give *take off* several distinct meanings, just as our ability to conceive of several types of dogs does not require us to give *dog* several distinct meanings. Without the horizontal-vertical distinction, we can still posit a general meaning for *take off*, just as we can with *dog*. Admittedly, genuine examples of multiple meaning, such as the homonymy of *light* in *She wore a light dress* ('not dark' or 'not heavy'), may seem to have the same attribute I have just noted for general terms; I must give additional reasons why *take off* is not multiple like *light*. My purpose here is to note the possibility, until now neglected, that *take off* is a combination of *take* and *off* and that each of these words and their combination have only a single meaning.

My argument assumes that meaning is MODULAR. The notion of modularity now has a prominent place in linguistics and related fields, and we can illustrate

it by a specific application to lexical meaning: what dictionaries offer as definitions and linguists as solely lexical senses are actually complexes of a word's inherent content and contextual inference. What appears to be a number of separate senses, possibly highly different and unrelatable, can better be analyzed as a single general lexical meaning that can be variously "modulated" by a range of specific interpretations.

One consequence of this claim is that I will be confronting throughout this book the notion of COMPOSITIONALITY: that the meaning of a sentence is the sum of its lexical parts, as structured by the syntax. Consider, as preview, these data:

- [10] The thief took the jewels.
- [11] The thief took his own jewels.
- [12] The jeweler took his jewels.
- [13] The jeweler took his hat.
- [14] John took his hat.
- [15] The king took the jewels.

A sentence such as [10] is usually cited in dictionaries under *take* with the sense 'steal'; anyone using [10] would almost always mean that a theft had taken place. A compositional analysis thus seems to require such a meaning, and *take* is the logical place to assign it.

However, stealing is only a particular kind of taking (and *steal* a HYPONYM of *take*). Sentence [11] lessens the likelihood of 'steal'; if the jewels belong to the thief, then it can hardly be stealing. We are alerted to the fact that a person called a thief is not thieving all the time, and thus perhaps is not doing so in the situation described by [10]. Nevertheless, we may suspect a theft also in [11], and even (since we're now aware of the possibility) in [12]. But this is more unlikely, and in [13] and [14] thieving would not occur to us at all without additional contextual information.

What I am claiming is that *take* has the same general meaning in all these sentences, and that we readily and even exclusively reach the conclusion of 'steal' in [10] because of at least four pragmatic inferences:

- (a) that the thief is so described at least in part because of what he is doing in this sentence;
- (b) that the jewels do not belong to the thief;
- (c) that jewels are something very likely to be stolen;
- (d) that the thief is acting in the stealthy way that we know thieves act.

Given the lexical-syntactic contribution of [10], we infer the most appropriate (likely, typical, plausible, contextually relevant) situation. Of course, additional context can change our judgments. These inferences come from our knowledge of the world, which also suggests:

- (e) that the thief was physically present to steal the jewels in [10].

This inference is less appropriate in [15], because kings can send others to

perform the deed. We thus interpret *take* in [10] more specifically as *steal*, just as we can interpret in a context *animal* as 'dog' or *that man* as 'my neighbor Mr. Smith'. We exercise a general inference that I will call PRAGMATIC SPECIALIZATION: we think of a particular kind of taking appropriate to the conditions that are (apparently) described.

Another type of pragmatic inference is illustrated by W3. It defines *break* in the phrase *break an artery* as 'to rupture the surface of and permit flowing out of effusing'. This definition confuses the sense of *break* with the reality to which the whole phrase refers. It is likely that a speaker would say *He broke an artery* and assume that a hearer would know that blood flowed; it is also likely that a speaker saying *He broke an artery and the artery started bleeding* might insult a hearer, by implying that the hearer needed to be told a basic fact about life. Yet, these likelihoods do not require the elaborate W3 definition; *break* here means what it means elsewhere. The full meaning is partly achieved through PRAGMATIC METONYMY, a general inference that supplies appropriate contiguous circumstances: here, a result.

This W3 definition is an especially glaring example of confusion between lexical and inferential contributions, but there are examples in this book that are much more subtle. These two examples demonstrate one of my themes: that our notions of word meaning have been formed by an implicit idealization in which language stands independent of extralinguistic contexts. This idealization thus creates a theoretical entity that seems deceptively "context free"; as a result, factors supposedly outside the isolated domain can be incorrectly included in the idealization. This result is what Bolinger (1971) has aptly called SEMANTIC OVERLOADING.

My point of view parallels modular conceptions in the tradition of Transformational Grammar [TG], particularly current Government-Binding [GB] theory. The transformational rules of Classical Transformational Grammar [CTG]—i.e., those modelled on *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Chomsky (1965)) [*Aspects*]—were, like dictionary definitions, highly specific and detailed; but there were general properties of the transformations that were missed and implicitly denied by the formulations. Now, in GB, there is one general transformation ("Move Alpha"), that is less informative; the details of CTG transformations are distributed among various other modules of the grammar.

The parallel is also practical: the word meanings I will propose or point toward in this book are often highly abstract and remote from practical usefulness, just as the GB model now is remote for those who once thought that transformational insights could be applied to tasks like teaching. Dictionaries are limited by practicalities, sensitive to the demands of (relatively) easy understanding. So were CTG transformations; though their formalism discouraged many mathophobes, they provided insights that could have been captured with little practical loss in prose.

CTG transformations often missed generalizations, especially the most

strong system: elements are "negative," their status being simply the non-choice of other options. As I will argue, a language necessarily has both kinds of systematicity, for principled universal reasons. More precisely, these are endpoints of a CONTINUUM OF SYSTEMATICITY: from completely closed classes exhibiting full mutuality with each other, which grade to more open classes exhibiting only modularity.

As is well known, systematicity has implications for translation. Translation from one language into another is at best approximate. A translation may inescapably fail to transfer correctly the division between what is said and not said, or between what is assumed and asserted: that is, it may run afoul of different semantic-pragmatic divisions in the two languages. But also, solely within semantics, systematic status (especially mutuality) may be different; even interchangeable one-word "equivalences" may be part of non-parallel systems.²

The same point applies to intralanguage definitions, which also are translations. This point is often overlooked, because translation is usually viewed solely in syntagmatic terms: the criterion is accuracy, which is appropriateness in a particular context. But systematicity more crucially concerns the paradigmatic dimension, whose criterion is comprehensiveness, in all contexts. Translation is possible because it is relatively "easy" to find linguistic means to solve the problem of a single context; semantic theory, however, must meet the systematic challenge of also faithfully capturing a word's full range.

A mistaken attribution of multiplicity is likeliest with the most general words in a language, which by virtue of their generality do not have synonyms that come close to having identical syntagmatic and paradigmatic requirements. To define such words by other words, recourse must be made to hyponyms which, by virtue of being multiple, give the impression of a polysemic word. This problem is particularly severe with verbs like *be*, *do*, *have*, *come*, *go*, *take*, *give*, and *break*, and with prepositions and conjunctions. As an additional complication, many hyponyms can be specifications of two antonymous words (such as *lime* for both *yellow* and *green*), and thus introduce extraneous ("emergent") factors; and, as we have seen with *break an artery*, pragmatic meaning may also be included.

Each definition may introduce only a small distortion, but the need for many such definitions creates many distortions. The resulting "meanings" seem clearly distinct and even unrelated, creating the impression of a polysemic or homonymic word.

Consider a TG analysis, now dated (McCawley (1971)), which concerns the following data:

[16] John is believed to *have* arrived at 2:00 *yesterday*.

[17] John arrived at 2:00 *yesterday*.

[18] John is believed to *have* drunk a gallon of beer *by now*.

elusive and important: those that provide insight not merely into one specific language, but into language capacity in general. I am assuming, like GB theorists, that a basic task for linguistic theory is to discover what is universal, and possible innate, in human language capacity.

Though I will repeatedly be critical of compositionality, it should become apparent that I have no quarrel with the notion as such, but rather with faulty assumptions concerning what is being composed. In parallel, transformationalists who now reject CTG rules are not rejecting the notion of 'rule' or even what such rules specifically claimed, but rather those particular formulations: that is, those particular distributions and combinations of theoretical detail, and the theoretical reasons that guided them. What is at issue is the following:

- (a) the proper distribution of meaning between lexical items and other factors that contribute to sentential and discourse meaning, and
- (b) the assumptions about universal linguistic capacity that justify such distributions.

Thus, I assume that lexical items as structured by the syntax do contribute compositionally to the meaning of a sentence; but this sum can then be altered in a number of different ways, two of which are Pragmatic Specialization and Pragmatic Metonymy.

While this position is not new or unique with me, my claims will probably be more extreme than those of any other scholar in the degree to which I "empty" words of their supposed meaning and assign it to other factors. In effect, I adopt Joos's (1972) "Semantic Axiom Number One": that a word should always be assumed to contribute as little meaning as possible to its context. Joos was thinking first in practical terms, specifically of *hapax legomena*, trying to guard against unwarranted intrusions of extra meaning into a translated text. But like him, I think his axiom has wider application, if supplemented by other theoretical assumptions, and one purpose of this book is to justify his insight.

1.3 SYSTEMATICITY

Modularity is a kind of systematicity; the observations made thus far apply directly to the Saussurean insight that linguistic order is systematic. The notion of 'system' in linguistics corresponds to the broader notion of 'ecology', the twentieth century's major interdisciplinary discovery. There are two kinds of systems that need to be distinguished, "weak" and "strong". A weak system exhibits MODULARITY: that is, all elements of the system exist within certain contexts, in relation with other elements. A strong system in addition exhibits MUTUALITY: elements are not merely related, but mutually defining. The status of each element determines and is determined by other elements; any change in one element means a change in the nature of others. The Saussurean system is a

- [19] John *has drunk* a gallon of beer *by now*.
 [20] John is believed to *have already met* Sue *when he married Cynthia*.
 [21] John *had already met* Sue *when he married Cynthia*.
- The odd-numbered sentences present a three-way time distinction, indicated by the different time expressions and the variation of past [17], present perfect [19], and past perfect [21]. The three-way distinction of time expressions is captured also in the infinitive phrases of the even-numbered sentences; but the other three-way distinction is paralleled only by *have*. The question: what is the status of *have*, given that it seems to be synonymous to three different expressions?

In the CTG framework, and even more so in the General Semantics [GS] model that followed, the answer had to be that *to have* was ambiguous. The parallels were captured by the transformation Subject Raising; since transformations were required to be meaning-preserving, the three-way distinction of [22-24] was assumed to be preserved in the single [25]:

- [22] It is likely that John has gone.
 [23] It is likely that John had gone.
 [24] It is likely that John went.
 [25] John is likely to have gone.

This is a clear example of syntax dominating paradigm, for the systems being equated are not parallel: in comparable contexts, there is a four-way paradigm in main clauses (two tenses and two perfects) and only a two-way paradigm in infinitives (infinitive or perfect infinitive). Sentence [25] was judged ambiguous not because it filled different roles in its own paradigm, but because it corresponded to separate roles in another paradigm. In effect, this analysis implies that distinctions made anywhere in the language must be assumed to exist throughout the language. Making [25] monosemic would have required (in that model) relinquishing either Subject Raising or the requirement that transformations preserve meaning. The same eclipsing of paradigm for syntax can be seen in a number of proposed transformations of the CTG period; in retrospect, we can see that Saussure's insight was forgotten, misunderstood, or tacitly rejected. (More recent analyses do not consider *that*-clauses and infinitives equivalent; Subject Raising applies only to the latter, and the two paradigms need not be equated.)

A second example shows definitional shortcomings on the phrasal level. The phrase *break the ice* is said to have both a literal and a figurative meaning. The latter is listed by dictionaries as a set phrase; in his *Idiom Structures in English*, Makkai (1972: 311) calls it an idiom. This requires that *break* be multiple in meaning (or, alternatively, sometimes have no separate meaning). The following examples illustrate the figurative use; it occurs as both active and passive:

- [26] Some people use an unusual thing, such as an unusual piece of jewelry, to break the ice. (DAI)

- [27] And he led the conversation around to the lovely palm trees which nodded outside the window: a conversational turn which broke the ice and won the admiration of the other visitors. (Lawrence Durrell)
 [28] I gave her tea, with milk and sugar and tried to think of something to say. Lovell broke the ice by asking me if I didn't think her hair was beautiful. (John Cheever)
 [29] The awkward silence of strangers' first encounter prevailed. Then one man mumbled, "Used to watch my grandfather make brooms. Only he used a different kind of contraption." The ice was broken. (Karen Ling)
- [30] The shyness of the young islanders was rapidly giving way to easy comradeship with the visitors. The American boys seemed to know by instinct how best to break the ice. (James Norman Hall)
 [31] On the other hand, when the ice was once broken and the barriers down, the President's charm was unusual and almost unailing. (Gamaliel Bradford)
 [32] Held scoreless and hitless until the fifth inning, the Mariners broke the ice on home runs by Willy Horton and Leon Roberts and went on to beat the Rangers. . . . (*Sporting News*)
 [33] That breaks the ice. Rich Yonaker gets the first basket of the second half. (Jim Thacker)

To strengthen his claim of idiomaticity, Makkai says that the definite article is mandatory: but it isn't in [34] and [35]. Example [36], although poetic and dated, also provides evidence:

- [34] His cheery Creole broke what little ice we encountered, after which conversation flowed like wine.
 (Kenneth MacLeish)
 [35] When such results occurred, he always made use of them to break any lingering ice, and establish communication.
 (Archibald M. Hill)
 [36] And your cold people are beyond all price
 When once you've broken their confounded ice.
 (Lord Byron, OED)

Both W3 and Makkai give the figurative phrase the definition 'to make a beginning'. Sentences [26-28], especially, appear to support this definition, but it is too general: I have just made a beginning with this book, yet it is not appropriate to say I've broken the ice. In addition, it is significant that in [29] the conversation appears to be delayed before starting, and in [33] the team goes several minutes before its first score. *Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition* (1982) [WNW] is more specific: 'to make a start by getting over initial difficulties'. The "difficulties" are what the word *ice* designates; the modifiers *what little* [34] and *lingering* [35] make sense in this light. In dictionaries that note these difficulties, they are specified as formality, reserve,

Metonymy. Such a start can in turn lead to an improved relationship with people, or an improved ability in other activities such as games; but these results are also pragmatic inferences. As we will see later in this book, with phrases like *hit the road* and *hit the bottle*, inferential meanings can become more prominent than inherent meaning, and this is one of the circumstances that lead us mistakenly to conclude that phrases like *break the ice* are idiomatic.

I will also show later, with many more examples, that *ice* has a meaning in *break the ice* which it has in other contexts. Thus, for both *break* and *ice*, I appeal to paradigmatic unity to counter what I consider to be incorrect analyses; I present data that demonstrate that linguistic investigation has slighted the paradigmatic dimension and thus failed to allow for full systematicity. But the nature of the data I have invoked now requires a discussion of data in general.

1.4 DATA: USE AND INTUITION

What data are relevant for any semantic study of English? There has been an ongoing debate in linguistics about the relative merits of data from actual use versus data from the intuitions of those who speak the language. American structuralists, dialectologists, and sociolinguists have emphasized the need for actual data, but the Chomsky tradition has favored intuition for its particular theoretical goals, offering these compelling reasons:

- (a) Occurring sentences are only a small subset of what are possible; there are an infinite number of possible sentences.
- (b) The relevant data include structural and relational judgments by speakers (whether, for example, two sentences are paraphrases) that actual use cannot provide. Sentences in themselves, in fact, are secondary phenomena; of primary interest is linguistic knowledge, the system of rules by which any speaker can in principle produce all possible sentences. Compared to the inadequate resources of use, intuition provides direct access to all of a speaker's linguistic knowledge, making available information that can be extracted from actual speech only with the aid of those same intuitions.
- (c) Actual speech is both too complicated and too simple for a particular theoretical issue. With an example specifically tailored to the occasion, guaranteed by intuition, the researcher can have the equivalent of a controlled experiment with only one independent variable. Conversely, sometimes the needed examples are so syntactically complex that they are unlikely to occur; yet such data can be supplied, under systematic control of the variables, by intuition.
- (d) Intuitions can also supply negative evidence, of what cannot possibly occur or can occur under conditions when rules are being broken. Non-use is uninformative.

In these four ways, intuition overcomes the deficiencies of use and provides

tension, aloofness, shyness, stiffness, awkwardness, hostility and lack of acquaintance. The last two are specified in [37] and [38]:

- [37] Diplomatic experts give the President credit for publicly recognizing the strategic importance of Iran and seeking to break the ice of hostility that has surrounded US-Iranian relations. . . . (Charlotte Saikowski)
- [38] They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance. . . . (Thomas Hardy)

The above examples also illustrate shyness [29] and various inability: to talk [28] and [29] and to score [32] and [33].

Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language (1963) [FW] calls these difficulties "restraints." In definitions, dictionaries talk of "getting through", "relaxing", "penetrating" or "overcoming" these difficulties or restraints. As the phrase indicates, a suitable verb is *break*. An analysis that treats the whole phrase as a metaphor or idiom fails to note that *break* is a verb that co-occurs with a wide range of both concrete and abstract objects; examples [39-48] show *break* in contexts very similar to those of figurative *break the ice*:

- [39] Now the emotions with Russ began to sort themselves out; he could feel that curious detachment breaking. (Ben Haas)
- [40] . . . the stalemate [is] to be broken by the three-man committee. . . . (Jerry Reed)
- [41] Briskly, trying to break the inertia, I looked at my watch, and rose, saying, "By Jove! I had no idea it was so late." (C. E. Scoggins)
- [42] . . . once the initial aloofness had been broken the use of synthetic indigotin made strides. (E. J. Holmyard)
- [43] . . . an indifference seldom broken by the bitterness toward her that Morgan has seen that night. (Tom Wicker)
- [44] . . . [she] treated her son with a formal, icy politeness which broke sometimes to reveal a disappointment . . . (Catherine Gaskin)
- [45] When nothing had changed by the evening of the third day, I knew the impasse must be broken. (New Yorker)
- [46] The type of synthesis, I predict, will not prove to break the impasse, the communication-barrier. (Donald Mitchell)
- [47] The clown succeeded in breaking the shy, inhibited silence of the crowd. (Francis Irbly Gwaltney)
- [48] I would have liked to break the silence but couldn't think of anything cheerful to say. (James Herriot)

From this evidence we can see the *break* in *break the ice* is the same word that occurs widely in other expressions; only the noun *ice* is figurative. *Break the ice* is thus not an idiom; it refers to the breaking of a difficult situation. If a difficult situation is broken, then a start on something can be made; I suggest that 'make a start' is an inference of Result, another example of Pragmatic

relevant and reliable evidence. These arguments are convincing to me, and I accept them completely in this study. But unfortunately the opposite question has not been asked: is intuition alone enough? As a survey of works in the transformational tradition quite readily shows, the answer to this unasked question seems to be "yes": almost all data are invented, produced ready-made for the occasion by the researcher. Is intuition without disadvantages? Can either actual data or intuition alone provide what is required?

These are the advantages of use:

- (a) Use does not rely as exclusively on the conscious mind as does intuition. Consider a parallel illustration of typical short-sighted prescriptivism: the campaign to get a /t/ pronounced in the word *often*. While proponents were partly successful, they apparently never noticed the word *soften*. For those "in the know," the mistake is obvious: *often* was treated as an isolated element, with the guiding precept that pronunciation should follow spelling. The basic problem of any prescriptivism (when it poses as descriptive) is that of having improvised data. These data in turn strengthen the guiding assumptions. Someone knowing the full range of words where a /t/ is lost, and systematically, is likely to have second thoughts about the precept that spelling should determine pronunciation.

Linguists see the limits of the *often*-prescriptivist because their procedures allow them access to more data. But these procedures, as Chomsky has repeatedly noted, are not ultimate guarantees of success. We cannot know in advance all the correct procedures and assumptions; these must be discovered by wits and genius, by trial and error. Unfortunately, the conscious mind is rather weak in finding the full range of data; procedures and theories based largely on intuition are always struggling with an unnecessarily meager database.

- (b) Use is more likely to provide evidence to undermine our hypotheses. Intuitions are not "pure": they can be conditioned by many assumptions, some tacit or highly complex, others as simple as the wish to justify one's theory. They may be subject to various standards of exactitude: when we say two sentences are paraphrases, how exactly are we applying our standards? Are we able to judge our degree of exactness? Even negative evidence may be suspect: there can be many reasons, some highly theory-specific, why some sentences seem ill-formed. Critics of TG reject the more complex TG examples, arguing that they are too complicated for use and thus cannot be considered well-formed, in spite of systematic extrapolations from well-formed simpler sentences. It is noteworthy that the judgments on both sides correlate with larger theoretical assumptions.

Intuition, limited by conscious awareness, does very

poorly when required both to invent and to judge. As sometimes (but insufficiently) acknowledged, it is a suspicious practice when researchers create the data that measure the worth of their theories; this demands a level of self-scrutiny only rarely achieved. Data of use, if collected sufficiently (even overabundantly), can guard against undue self-justification; reveal tacit theoretical biasing, and provide our intuition with enough material to make more critical judgments.

- (c) Use challenges the mistaken belief that we can "isolate" linguistic factors. Given the impure status of intuitional data, it is questionable whether the intuitional strategy of controlling example sentences for one variable actually allows data to test the influence of tacit assumptions; rather, this strategy almost guarantees their permanent lock on our insight. Chomsky (1955), among others, has disparaged the worth of experiments on rats that leave the rat with only two choices. Such experiments may not be as free of extraneous variables as the experimenters assume, but rather introduce unacknowledged effects of minimization, thus informing us merely about the abilities of rats when limited to only two choices. The prospect of enlightenment with controlled procedures is proportionally dimmer with human beings.

- (d) Although actual data may be too complex and too simple with respect to intuition, the converse is also true. As I will show, the simplified sentences of intuition are always judged more semantically complex than they should be. Also, invented sentences rarely show the radical unexpected specificity of detail and context that actual data provide. Invented sentences tend to be simplistic even when complex: well-behaved (and overexemplified) nouns and verbs link in stereotypic ways. This practice serves to reaffirm the belief that the semantics of some rarified group of sentences can be determined as if those sentences were "context free". Context, both linguistic and extralinguistic, is *always tacitly assumed*; but since we are rarely aware how much is added, we tend confidently to believe that we have isolated only what we want.

A linguist who struggles with actual sentences is not so easily fooled; the bewildering range of potentially relevant factors is too apparent, and the boundaries between semantic and pragmatic (intralinguistic versus extralinguistic) contributions to meaning are not so intuitively clear. Some meanings that seem inherent in language when viewed through intuitional data appear rather to be external when viewed through actual data.

Linguists who attempt to factor out pragmatic effects without investigating such effects in actual detail are at the mercy of pretheoretical habits that try to assign as much perceived meaning as possible to words. Intuition alone cannot

be faulty; Chomsky has repeatedly stressed that such a hypothesis is tentative, as is all scientific endeavor (Chomsky (1980, Chapter One)). With similar tentative assurance, I assume in this book that there is something relatively autonomous that can be "language-internal meaning", which I will consider semantic. But I am also constantly preoccupied with pragmatic, language-external meaning, which interacts with semantics to produce the full meaning of human speech: especially so since what I take as semantic will differ drastically from what is normally assumed. An additional complication is that both semantics and pragmatics can be internally highly modular; also, these modularities, and their interactions, may be more continuous than discrete.

The more heterogeneous a system becomes, the more it may appear in some parts not to be systematic at all. Such a system will be rich in individuation; many interacting rules, conditions, and constraints can enable the creation of many small-scale paradigms, with very few members, perhaps only one. In fact, every lexical item is finally in a paradigm exclusively its own. Yet, with any paradigm of a single member, it is questionable whether there is a larger operative order at all; for those linguists not committed to finding systematicity, a singular phrase may appear to be idiomatic, with no systematic explanation. As further complication, a language may have both types of singularity, with no immediately evident means of determining which is which.

No reasonable theory of language can fail to assume a high degree of heterogeneity. This complexity creates the need for idealization, the purpose of which is to homogenize. That is the purpose of the TG idealization [IDEAL], stated at the beginning of *Aspects*, which assumes an ideal speaker-hearer, in a homogeneous speech community, with perfect knowledge of the language, which is learned instantaneously. Formal register is also implied, with "complete" sentences treated as isolated objects of thought, independent of any discourse use. This homogenized language is a model of competence; all the omitted heterogeneity (plus various kinds of "lapses") is to be incorporated in a model of performance.

What is the status of IDEAL? Hostile and even friendly critics over the years have noted the obvious: it is highly unrealistic, and simply false. No community is homogeneous, no language learning is instantaneous, languages have more than a formal register, and expressions have multiple uses. The idealization even borders on the inconceivable: who or what could the "ideal" speaker-hearer with "perfect" knowledge possibly be? Critics charge that IDEAL illegitimately eliminates the contingencies of speakers, hearers, and language use, leaving a "competence" that appears to be highly remote from any scientific accountability.

It might be argued that IDEAL merely serves as a useful artifice, a descriptive expediency; but Chomsky does not see it as such. He claims that it has a reality independent of our theorizing: it corresponds to a mental grammar that is innate and therefore universal and that ultimately can be correlated to physical brain states. IDEAL thus is meant as a substantive empirical claim,

break the inherited habits. "Conscious control" is only part of research in the human sciences; "indwelling" is also required. Through actual data, we have the resources of both our conscious and unconscious knowledge; we are deterred from oversimplifying our task and making it impossible.³

Thus, this book uses many attestations. It is important to be clear about what this means, especially for those trained in TG (as I was) to associate reliance on actual data with the shallow belief that principles and regularities arise automatically from evidence and that all the scientist needs to do is record the obvious conclusions. To the contrary, no amount of "reality" ever leads automatically to explanation; reasons and conclusions require the interpreting human mind. No matter how plentiful the data, they are never enough. In all except logically exhaustible theories, there are always more possible data and thus there is the open potential for correction. A scientist must always go beyond data, relying finally on intuition. A theory, no matter how well-founded, is more faith than fact.

Actual data without intuition hardly qualify as data at all. But intuition without sufficient supporting actual data is barren; both are necessary. The debate on relative merits has been at best short-sightedness, at worst a barrier to genuine semantic research. The greatest need presently in semantic research is for abundant actual data with which our intuitions can do their work well.⁴

1.5 HETEROGENEITY

If a strong system were fully homogeneous, any idealization would be highly distortive. With every element in mutual dependence on all others, a change in one would imply a change in all, and the status of one element could not be ascertained without equal attention to all the others; the system would thus have to be studied completely. But in a weak, modular system, subsystems can relate weakly to each other, with relative autonomy, so that the effects of any change will be localized. Thus, it is possible to posit idealizations that may be relatively accurate—if, that is, our posited modularities correspond to actual ones.

However, a converse issue then becomes important: how much heterogeneity is there? Are we dealing with a relatively few modularities, or almost countless many? The latter possibility is as despairing a prospect for idealizations as a completely homogeneous system, or no system at all.

Human language capacity is part of a larger system of capacities; GB assumes that it has some modular autonomy, although we cannot know in advance which parts are (relatively) autonomous and which are not. Of course, there is no absolute autonomy, for the character of a module is necessarily determined in many ways by larger systems. GB also assumes that even a near-autonomous module of language capacity can itself be internally modular; some of these submodules seem intuitively clear at present, though they may prove not to be so.

The assumption of a specific modularity of Language Capacity may itself

testable by research. But, even if justified, the severity of the idealization calls into question most of our testing measures. Actual conscious human knowledge necessarily involves full heterogeneity, not just that of the idealization. Most current tests (and intuition) fail to assure that they test merely what they intend to test.

This has implications both ways: tests do not necessarily invalidate IDEAL; but on the other hand, the difficulty of formulating a test does not strengthen it, but may make it effectively useless, if no means of evaluation can be applied. The most reliable tests have been (excessively?) formal; over thirty years of the TG tradition, there has been constant change and diversification, created by analytical testing that found earlier models inadequate.

These considerations bear on my running appeal to, and quarrel with, the linguist whose ideas have probably had the most immediate influence on this book: Dwight Bolinger. Through the first thirty years of TG, Bolinger has been its most dedicated and detailed critic. He has two basic disagreements: one that I can support (though not for his reasons), one that I cannot. These issues are stated comprehensively in his article, "Meaning and memory" (1976).

CTG was, according to Bolinger, an inappropriately deductive approach to language, committed to finding an underlying formal system that would be highly homogeneous, and thus explicable by rules that swept grandly across a wide range of contexts. To a man who has spent his scholarly life describing many detailed subtleties and idiosyncrasies, this is highly implausible. He sums up his disagreement thus (pp. 11-12):

Prime attention to the overarching system and more or less

incidental attention to the local detail follows naturally from the assumption that the grammar is homogenous and self-confirming.

In a formal deductive system everything is explained when everything fits. There is no need to worry about missing a detail or two because sooner or later any mistake or oversight will show up in a grinding of the gears. It even seems rather petty to insist on full and precise documentation in each separate province of the realm. The power of the system as a whole to reveal a flaw is so great that mastering the grand design outweighs any small help that can be picked up from one of its mere neighborhoods. But once homogeneity is denied, the security is gone. Separate—and, yes, ad hoc—explanations for each part become essential. It is no longer safe to assume that the system will correct itself.

Unquestionably it will in many ways; certainly there are local regularities as well as universal ones; but the self-corrective remedies must be sought AFTER one has canvassed as thoroughly as possible in each neighborhood, approaching the indwellers on their own terms.

Bolinger follows these remarks with a sustained argument that a language is basically idiomatic, in large part (his words) "jerry built." In this view, systems are possible and sometimes present, but not necessary or crucial. To counter

CTG emphasis on our rule-directed capacity, he champions the mind's storage capacity, which makes possible the memorizing of many unordered specifics. This is an argument that Bolinger is perhaps best qualified to make, since he has found the discouraging details to undermine many a proposed generalization.

Yet, without denying any of his special details, I think he is wrong in thinking that language is only contingently or occasionally systematic. To repeat: it is possible to have a heterogeneous system that allows a high degree of complexity. Many "idioms" are the result not of irregularity, but of multiple intersecting regularities that allow only one or a few possible realizations. That is, I claim the following:

[B] INDIVIDUATION CONDITION

Individuation is the result of highly complex systems. The more complex a system, the more diverse its individuals, and the less likelihood that any one individual can directly reveal the system.

Individuation is a central problem in semantic theory, if only because we must deal with individual lexical items. The excessive degree of homogenization in TG becomes critical every time a linguist tries to argue from the patterning of one word to a supposed class that the word represents. This procedure is successful only when we can isolate just those properties common to the words in the posited class. We have no advance assurance that this can be easily done, and a small database merely hides the problem: discussions of Dative Movement, for example, are compromised if each new researcher sticks only to the verb *give* and a few others (and only part of their ranges). A limited database prolongs the life, not only of a mistaken transformation, but also of a mistaken assessment of the homogeneity of a class.

As this book demonstrates, I agree with Bolinger's methodology. Since words (and, even more so, sentences) can be highly individual, my first priority must be the detailed investigation of "local" areas, with large sets of data, rather than the formulating of general rules with limited data.

The challenge for a theory of semantics is to do justice both to the system and to its individuals. IDEAL can overgeneralize and thus undervalue the individuals. An idiomatic view, conversely, can undergeneralize and thus undervalue the system. IDEAL in effect tries to isolate several fundamental generalized modules that are presumed to be the foundation for additional modules that diversify. As the competence-performance distinction implies (or should), progressively more inclusive theories require a parallel series of progressively more concrete idealizations, incorporating some of the variability eliminated in the first.

It is thus essential for linguists who accept IDEAL to flesh out these more inclusive idealizations, as a necessary part of what Chomsky (1980: 25) calls "the social division of linguistic labor." Of course, this wider range can make the task more difficult. As compensation, however, if the idealization chosen is the one necessary to best describe the investigator's problem, the task should be

the notion of "mind"; **NORMAL** linguists assume that individual minds (or their behavioral evidence) are fundamental. R. Hall comments (1978: 34):

The only linguistic REALITIES, in the sense of directly observable or deducible phenomena, are idiolects and the elements into which they can be analysed; all other linguistic entities are abstractions, arrived at by either naive or scientific analysis.

However, this is too strongly stated: it contravenes the basic assumption of social sciences that humans are social creatures, in large part (and necessarily so) created by their social context. Yet, Hall's remarks are a needed caution against ignoring individuation, of assuming too much social homogeneity. Conversely, **IDEAL** cautions us not to overvalue the individual speaker. We must search for the general and systematic conditions that enable individual speakers to develop their particular idiolects. Both cautions are necessary.

Optimally, we need the means of showing both all the degrees of uniformity and all the degrees of diversity. We take the usual leap of faith: if we keep in mind the proportional view that some linguistic facts are universal and some are idiolectal (and even nonce), with a continuous cline in between, we can talk about "the mind" while guarding against reducing our theories to the polar extremes of perfection and idiolect.

We can grant that some speakers may learn singularities as isolated entities; but how much should we generalize such isolated learning? There is evidence that humans retain and use knowledge best when it is integrated with other knowledge: specifically, when it is modularly organized. The hierarchical structure of human language shows this clearly. In contrast, we do poorly on isolated bits of information, such as people's names. While this does not make idioms impossible or even unlikely, it suggests a strong tendency for humans to integrate their knowledge, rather than keeping it in isolated storage. If this observation has any validity, it suggests that an idiomatic-view-in-general presents a highly misleading image of the mind's potential and effectiveness.

However, I think we can make more ambitious claims about the human mind, even while constrained to respect both individual variation and the limits of our present knowledge. The major organizing principle of this book is such a claim about the human mind:

[C] **VOCABULARY PRINCIPLE**

The vocabulary of a language is ordered in accord with the order of the human mind. Closed minimal classes in a language reflect primary, unconscious order, remote from reality. Open maximal classes in a language reflect secondary, conscious order, related to reality. There is a continuous cline from closed to open, from unconscious to conscious.

My justification for this claim is the full weight of this book. For now, I note it in order to state the major difficulty I have with Bolinger's view: he seems to drastically underestimate unconscious linguistic knowledge. Ironically,

made easier. We cannot know in advance where everything goes; by trying to solve a problem in the wrong idealization, we can create distortions that may introduce distortions into other problems as well.

Distortive consequences can be most costly at the most abstract level, **IDEAL**, where we cannot see fully which data are part of those modules we intended to eliminate. Inevitably, the more abstract an idealization, the more likely it will try to describe too much, by homogenizing variations and providing solutions for problems that should simply be ignored at that degree of abstraction. It is significant that with each innovation in TG, less is required of the most abstract idealization, with also less multiple meaning.

My claim in this book is that, under the influence of dictionaries, we have misrepresented linguistically conveyed meaning, attributing too much to a minimal range of modules. I am thus committed to a more inclusive idealization. Obviously, **IDEAL** must at least be modulated specifically to the range of variabilities that we call English. But any attempt to join "IDEAL-English" and "lexical meaning", as these notions have usually been envisioned, will lead to excessive homonymy, polysemy, idioms, and "dummy" elements.

In effect, my procedure involves a search for the more concrete idealizations within which the contributions to dictionary-type definitions can be identified and differentiated. **IDEAL** was fashioned to avoid, at least initially, the necessity of Bolinger's local methodology; but, to distinguish semantic from pragmatic, I must pay him heed.

1.6 MINDS AND REALITIES

Bolinger's reasoning and methodology do not necessarily lead to the view he champions: that most of language is idiomatic, and that the large resources of our memory, supposedly ignored by TG, enable us to store many set phrases that are only minimally integrated into our full linguistic knowledge. Bolinger's view of memory is somewhat skimpy, for he seems to limit it too much to listed storage. Instead, couldn't this storage capacity be organizationally enabled and enhanced by the complex set of rules that Bolinger feels moved to criticize?

Instead of the idealized speaker-hearer, Bolinger assumes, as do many transformational critics, "normal" speakers [**NORMAL**], the highly diverse actual human beings who use the language. Unlike the perfect speaker-hearer, normal speakers may not have organized their linguistic knowledge to an optimal systematic degree. Bolinger quotes Antilla (1972: 349) with approval:

Memory or brain storage is on a much more extravagant scale than we would like to think; even the most "obvious" cases [of apparent generalization] can be stored separately.

We again meet the problem of individuation, this time with the individual speaker. By positing the ideal speaker-hearer, Chomsky attempted to generalize

Bolinger shares TG's greatest shortcoming: he trusts too much in his intuition. (His may be the most brilliant and resourceful linguist's intuition we have going, but it's still intuition.)

Of course, we must note here something that Chomsky has, almost in vain, tried to make clear: that we are not used to thinking of non-conscious order as "knowledge", and so we constantly quarrel with every remark about knowledge that seems to depart from immediate conscious understanding. Unconscious knowledge tends to be highly ordered, conscious knowledge much less so. Thus, those who reason too exclusively from awareness can very easily conclude that linguistic knowledge is "jerry built." With the unconscious mind supplying order, consciousness is free (and specifically able) to be (relatively) disorderly (even to "break rules"); it is low-level disorder that makes consciousness possible.

Chomsky (1980: 133) makes a parallel point about pedagogical treatments of language, which (along with dictionaries) have been our means for conscious language learning and reflection. These concentrate largely on (what is seen as) the exceptional, leaving more generalized order to be intuited or simply ignored. The apparent idiomaticity of language thus looms large by default; yet, again, what does this conscious awareness of language tell us about the whole of our linguistic capacity?

I will be arguing for unconscious meanings with radically different categories and processes that are perhaps beyond conscious comprehension. This possibility is precluded in both IDEAL and NORMAL. While IDEAL does not directly deny unconscious order, its effect is to neutralize the interactive complexity of conscious versus unconscious knowledge; and then its exclusive reliance on intuition tends to limit conceivable knowledge to conscious categories. The effect of NORMAL is to eliminate any categories that depart radically from the awareness of the normal speaker. The unhappy coincidence is that both are too preoccupied with consciousness.

We can see this in Bolinger's "Meaning and memory" (1976: 3):

Suppose we took the phrase *out of patience* and looked for an underlying representation. It would have to contain the same *out of* that is found in *out of money*, *out of time*, *out of ice cream*, *out of* anything that one formerly had a supply of but had no longer. It never dawned on me, till the 24th day of January 1973, that the *out of* in *out of patience* had any connection with that other *out of*—penetrating the source of the expression was one of those odd strokes of illumination that we get every so often with something we have been using all our lives. It is clear that most people do not associate the two, because if they did they would not turn *out of patience* into a command, or use intensifiers with it (*Don't be so out of patience!*, **Don't be so out of money!*) When we say *out of patience* we are not pulling *out of* and *patience* separately from storage and putting them together but retrieving the whole thing at once.

The issue is the status of *out of*. Bolinger appeals to several marginal considerations and is too selective in choosing relevant paradigms, thus assuring an idiomatic conclusion. Because we need not be consciously aware to know something, his discovery of January 1973 is minimally relevant, except to his personal linguistic autobiography, or to illustrate the limits of consciousness. Even if a phrase is stored as a unit, it need not be isolated from the rest of the language; it can still be the same *out of*. What has to be shown by idiomatians, and not merely assumed, is that the "fixedness" of a phrase necessarily changes the semantic status of its words.

This leaves us with one relevant argument: the different contextual effects of *out of patience* and *out of money*. But Bolinger has not made enough paradigmatic checks. There are other data his intuition didn't find: *Don't be so impatient!*, **Don't be so penniless*. These suggest that the difference comes from the more concrete (real-world) difference between patience and money. Their individualities create a difference, but not necessarily one in *out of*. Why are *I've run out of money* and *I've run out of patience* parallel? Why can *I've run out* or *I'm all out* be elliptical for either? (These data suggest that even *out of* is decomposable.)

While we need not take these parallels totally at face value (they may be misleading, and there are other paradigms to check), we can't ignore them. TG is often accused of imposing order by fiat; but here Bolinger seems to be imposing disorder by fiat. To repeat: the problem for all "impositions" is an exaggerated faith in conscious intuition.

Because conscious awareness underestimates the order supplied by the unconscious, it is relatively easy to find rather obvious order that has escaped everyone's notice. Consider the following:

[49] Jack broke off ties with Bill.

[50] Jack broke ties off with Bill.

[51] Jack broke off with Bill.

[52] Jack broke ties with Bill.

[53] Jack broke with Bill.

[54] Jack broke it off with Bill.

Volume One of *The Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* [ODIE], "Verbs with Prepositions and Particles," lists forty-nine different expressions with *break*, including (i) four different *break off* phrases, one exemplified by "Aren't they getting married then?" "No, they've broken it off"; and (ii) a *break with*, exemplified in *John has broken with his family*. In addition, some dictionaries list *break off with* as an idiom, thus isolating three different expressions that in [49–54] seem closely related.

Are these similarities purely accidental? The differences in meaning appear to correlate with the differences in constituent words. A plausible solution would recognize (a) that *off* is optional and (b) that a *with*-phrase can modify an implicit nominal. Composing meaning from the constituents seems rather

straightforward. Since this pattern has gone unnoticed, should we take it as merely a homonymic coincidence? Perhaps it will prove to be something quite different in the light of further data and assessment, but to judge these expressions as idioms because speakers need not consciously know the full pattern (or because lexicographers and linguists have heretofore pronounced them as idioms) seems to be too great a preference for precedent or current wisdom over data: that is, a preference for overconscious dogmatism.

Much of what I have said thus far requires considerable elaboration; in particular, I need to say more about unconscious and conscious aspects of language. I also need to do some of the "local" investigation that Bolinger's methodology, and mine, requires. Without such specific demonstrations of what I am driving at, my general theoretical musing (even assuming I did it well) would likely be wildly misunderstood. Throughout this book, I will be doing extended studies of particular words: the verbs *bear*, *hit*, *kick* and *slap*, the noun *ice*, and the alleged "particles" of English, which I consider (with Emonds (1972)) to be intransitive prepositions. In these studies I assume the monosemic bias and detail its implications. The next chapter is devoted to a word that seems (according to Bolinger) not to have a meaning at all: the verb *bear*.

Chapter 2

THE VERB BEAR

The best way to explore the possibilities of monosemy is to analyze in depth a particular word. This procedure is severely limited: every word is highly individual, so we are not assured of general paradigmatic insights; we cannot have reliable conclusions without knowing in full a word's semantic field. However, by adopting the criterion of Comprehensiveness, we can find sufficient reason to doubt a number of current assurances. Following the Monosemic Bias, I will assume this word has only one meaning, and attempt to determine what would be required for that assumption to be sustained. I will then develop and justify these requirements more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

2.1 PRELIMINARIES

I choose the verb *bear* because Bolinger (1976) uses it to argue that languages are highly idiomatic; it appears to be the worst possible candidate for semantic unity and the "freedom" of wide syntactic generalization:

The best example I can think of to illustrate a struggle toward freedom that never quite makes it is the verb *to bear*. It is a veritable jungle of idioms and collocational restrictions with no heart to pump blood through it but with peripheral organs that

