

**McCawley, James D(avid)**, b. Mar. 31, 1938, in Glasgow, Scotland, d. Apr. 10, 1999, Chicago, IL, USA; pioneer generative linguist and polymath, whose interests ranged over phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, lexicography, philosophy, music, and gastronomy; with G. Lakoff, J.R. Ross, and P. Postal, responsible for Generative Semantics, the first attempt to adapt Chomsky's generative theory to real linguistic phenomena, including meaning.

Educated at parochial schools in Chicago, where his family moved after the war, M. entered the University of Chicago at the age of 16, earning an M. A. in Mathematics four years later. After a year spent mostly studying languages at Münster, he entered the first linguistics Ph.D. class at MIT, receiving his doctorate in 1965 under Chomsky's supervision with a dissertation on Japanese phonology. He returned to the University of Chicago as Assistant Professor, was promoted to Associate Professor in 1969, and to Professor in 1970. In later years at Chicago he was appointed *honoris causa* as Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor of Linguistics and of East Asian Languages and Civilizations.

During M.'s study at MIT, Chomsky's novel generative theory of syntax was in the air, with exciting advances announced almost daily. While there, M. met Ross, then a fellow student, and Postal and Lakoff, young faculty at area schools, who were developing an 'abstract syntax', generalizing Chomsky's derivational methodology to attack problems of both syntax and meaning, as an earlier generation of linguists had generalized alternation tests to problems of both phonemics and morphology. With his background in logic and mathematics, M. felt quite comfortable with such abstraction; his first important paper in the area (1968) proposed what became a standard part of Generative Semantic theory—the idea that 'deep structure' was in fact simply meaning (in the form of a 'natural logic') from which sentences were generated by syntactic rules. All was grist for the derivational mill, where syntactic solutions were to be found for semantic problems.

Along with Lakoff, Postal, and Ross, M. taught a very popular course in this theory at the 1968 Summer Institute, attracting to Chicago students like Georgia Green, Jerry Morgan, and Robert Binnick, whose *samizdat*' manuscript "Camelot 1968" was widely circulated and became the first systematic account of Generative Semantics. That same year appeared the first published *CLS* volume, *Papers from the Fourth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society*, edited by B. Darden, A. Davison, and C.-J. Bailey. Over the next decade and be-

yond, M. and his students at Chicago would be instrumental in the growth of this organization and the prestige of its annual proceedings volumes, organized and edited by Chicago students, as a principal venue for Generative Semantics research.

In the 1970's there also occurred the "linguistics wars" (Harris 1993), the ongoing conflict between adherents of Generative Semantics and of Chomsky's competing theories, eventually resolved (Huck and Goldsmith 1994, 1995) by demographics: Chomsky and his students simply produced more Ph.D.s and flooded the academic market with adherents. M.'s contributions to the intellectual side of this conflict are collected in *Thirty Million Theories of Grammar* (1982), a title representing his estimate of the number of possible combinations of reasonable positions one could take on empirical issues in syntax; he said he reached this value "by computing  $2^{25}$  and rounding downward." He never found any good intellectual or scientific reasons for abandoning his grammatical theory, but he did modify and improve it incrementally over the next decades, though he refused to give it a name, citing problems of "truth in labelling".

M.'s sense of humor was legendary; through his alter ego Quang Phúc Đông, author of "English Sentences Without Overt Grammatical Subject" (in: Zwicky et al. 1971), he was responsible for bringing into existence entire genres of humorous and satirical linguistics; his aphorisms (e.g. "When you hear a linguist use the word 'explanation', you should put your hand on your wallet") were widely quoted and his humorous writings (e.g. "Days in the Month of May That are of Interest to Linguists") and annual data squib collections ("Linguistic Flea Circus") were circulated and cited worldwide. He was greatly loved, and his sudden death by a heart attack at the age of 61 came as a severe shock to the world linguistic community.

During the last two decades of his career he taught, travelled, and lectured on many topics and in many countries, in addition to publishing prolifically. His work on grammar culminated eventually in two textbooks, one on semantics, logic, and pragmatics (1981; second edition 1993), and one on English syntax (1988; second edition 1998). Both are classics that repay careful study, bristling with interesting linguistic examples, careful explication of hypotheses about them from a variety of sources, and discussion of conclusions to be drawn with them.

Basic to M.'s theory of grammar is the application and elaboration of what he regarded as the really fruitful ideas of generative grammar: constituency, multiple syntactic strata, and

the cyclic principle. He rejected, however, what he regarded as counterproductive and gratuitous ideas like the metaphor of a ‘base’ structure, the necessity of keeping categories and structures constant throughout derivations, and the ‘modularity’ espoused by Chomsky. (M. remarked on “the fetish for keeping syntax and semantics separate”, and the impossibility of talking about any one of semantics, logic, and pragmatics “without getting into the other two, so I don’t even try to keep them separate”.) By refusing to follow fads, by carefully updating his theory with innovations as they proved themselves in practice, and by regarding data as his principal scientific interest, M. managed a proof by construction of the proposition that a generative theory can be used to write a grammar, and that it can deal with any and all linguistic phenomena.

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