DESCRIBING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Series editors
John Sinclair
Ronald Carter

Patterns of Lexis in Text

Michael Hoey

Oxford University Press

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To my children,
Alice and Richard (in alphabetical order)
Richard and Alice (by age)

(since I could never put one before the other)

Acknowledgements

The work reported in this book has been almost twenty years in the making and has in that time been helped by many people. It began life as research towards a thesis under the supervision of Sir Randolph Quirk. Though pressure of employment and other research interests resulted in that thesis never being written, the initial encouragement, advice, and guidance of Sir Randolph made an impact on the work that is still with it today, to its great benefit. All the positions adopted in Chapters 5 and 6 were in place by the late seventies but my inexperience and the climate of linguistics at that time meant that I was not in a position to write it up in a way that would have reached an audience. During that period I was greatly supported and advised by Eugene Winter who has been tireless in his encouragement and helpful criticism ever since. The most recent fruits of his support have been the detailed and wide-ranging comments he has offered on the complete manuscript of this book. Although, like every author, I have clung to some of my errors, there is no question that my book is markedly better for his advice.

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will reveal, and it is only space and the desire not to appear to be diluting my gratitude that prevents me from listing many more.

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The author and series editors

Michael Hoey is a senior lecturer in the School of English at the University of Birmingham where he has worked since 1979. Previously, from 1970 to 1979, he lectured in linguistics at the Hatfield Polytechnic. At Birmingham he teaches on the MA course in Applied English Linguistics, and has played a crucial role in the setting up and running of the Cobuild project: for three years he acted as its research administrator. His research has been in discourse analysis, lexis, and stylistics. Dr Hoey has presented his work in lectures and seminars in places as far apart as Brazil and Poland, and has published widely in his areas of research since 1979.

John Sinclair has been Professor of Modern English Language at the University of Birmingham since 1965. His main areas of research are discourse (both spoken and written) and computational linguistics—with particular emphasis on the study of very long texts. He has been consultant/adviser to a number of groups including, among others, the Bullock Committee, The British Council, and the National Congress for Languages in Education. He holds the title of Adjunct Professor in Jiao Tong University, Shanghai. Professor Sinclair has published extensively, and is currently Editor-in-Chief of the Cobuild project at Birmingham University.

Ronald Carter is Professor of Modern English Language in the Department of English Studies at the University of Nottingham where he has taught since 1979. He is Chairman of the Poetics and Linguistics Association of Great Britain, a member of CNAA panels for Humanities, and a member of the Literature Advisory Committee of The British Council. Dr Carter has published widely in the areas of language and education, applied linguistics, and literary linguistics. He is Director of the Centre for English Language Education at the University of Nottingham and is currently seconded part-time as National Co-ordinator for Language in the National Curriculum.

Foreword

Describing English Language

The Describing English Language series provides much-needed descriptions of modern English. Analysis of extended naturally-occurring texts, spoken and written, and, in particular, computer processing of texts have revealed quite unsuspected patterns of language. Traditional descriptive frameworks are normally not able to account for or accommodate such phenomena, and new approaches are required. This series aims to meet the challenge of describing linguistic features as they are encountered in real contexts of use in extended stretches of discourse. Accordingly, and taking the revelations of recent research into account, each book in the series will make appropriate reference to corpora of naturally-occurring data.

The series will cover most areas of the continuum between theoretical and applied linguistics, converging around the mid-point suggested by the term 'descriptive'. In this way, we believe the series can be of maximum potential usefulness.

One principal aim of the series is to exploit the relevance to teaching of an increased emphasis on the description of naturally-occurring stretches of language. To this end, the books are illustrated with frequent references to examples of language use. Contributors to the series will consider both the substantial changes taking place in our understanding of the English language and the inevitable effect of such changes upon syllabus specifications, design of materials and choice of method.

John Sinclair, *University of Birmingham*
Ronald Carter, *University of Nottingham*

Patterns of Lexis in Text

Dr Hoey already has an international reputation for original work in the structure of written discourse. He has for many years insisted on the importance of lexical patterning, and has gradually worked out the original position which he sets out in this new book. This position has the advantage that, while giving valuable insights into text organization from a theoretical point of view, it is also of direct practical relevance; an application of it to automatic abstracting has attracted research support recently.

The idea that vocabulary words might be best described in dictionaries is challenged strongly by this book. It shows that much of the coherence, as well as the cohesion, of text is created by the lexical ties of individual words with each other.

Dr Hoey writes fluently, and explains complicated matters in straightforward prose. His enthusiasm for his subject is evident on every page.

John Sinclair

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PART ONE

Introduction: questions that need answering

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