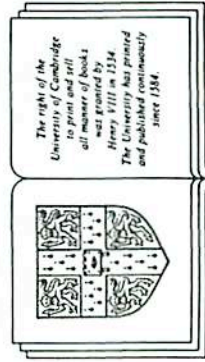


# *Cultural models in language and thought*

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## The definition of lie

AN EXAMINATION OF THE FOLK MODELS  
UNDERLYING A SEMANTIC PROTOTYPE<sup>1</sup>

Eve E. Sweetser

This paper investigates how the semantic structure of one English word depends on, and reflects, our models of relevant areas of experience. As a linguist, my original concern was with the problems posed by the word *lie* for traditional semantic theories; but these problems led inexorably to the cultural models of informational exchange that motivate the existence of a semantic entity meaning *lie*.<sup>2</sup> I begin by posing the semantic problem and go on to the cultural solution.

George Lakoff (1972), Fillmore (1977), and Coleman and Kay (1981) have argued against traditional generative and structuralist "checklists" of semantic features that constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for set-membership in the category denoted by a word. Lexical categories can have better or worse members, or *partial* members.<sup>3</sup> Kay and McDaniel (1978) have shown that color categories lack necessary and sufficient conditions; *red* is a gradient quality whose category-boundaries are best described by fuzzy set theory rather than by traditional set theory. Checklist feature-definitions, which do not allow for color's being "sorta red," must be replaced by a theory capable of dealing with fuzzy set-membership. Prototype semantics views word-meaning as determined by a central or prototypical application, rather than a category-boundaries. Clear definitions can thus be given for words with fuzzy boundaries of application. We define the best instance of a word's use, and expect real-world cases to fit this best example more or less, rather than perfectly or not at all.

Coleman and Kay (1981) show that prototype theory is needed to explain the usage of the verb *lie*.<sup>4</sup> As is natural in-prototype semantics (but not in traditional set-membership semantics), lying is a matter of more or less. Clear central cases of lies occur when all of Coleman and Kay's proposed conditions are fulfilled; namely, (a) speaker believes statement is false; (b) speaker intends to deceive hearer by making the statement; and (c) the statement is false in fact. Conversely, a statement fulfilling none of a-c is a clear nonlie. But when only one or two of a-c hold, speakers are frequently confused and find it difficult to categorize an action as lie or nonlie. Further, these conditions (unlike checklist-features)

differ in weight, (a) being strongest and (c) weakest in influencing speakers' categorization of acts as lies.

Prototype semantics has been attentive to the grounding of language in the speaker's world. Kay and McDaniel found physical perceptual reasons for color-term universals; Rosch (1978) and Mervis and Rosch (1981) demonstrate that linguistic categories depend on general human category-formation abilities. Fillmore (1977) discusses some ways in which the social world shapes word-meaning. *Bachelor* is a classic difficult case: Why is it difficult to say whether the Pope, or a thrice-married divorcé, can be called a bachelor? The answer, Fillmore says, is that *bachelor* depends on a simplified world-view in which people are marriageable at a certain age, mostly marry at that age, and stay married to the same spouse. In this simplified world, a bachelor is simply any unmarried male past marriageable age; *outside* the simplified world, the word *bachelor* just does not apply. *Bachelor* necessarily evokes a prototypical schema of marriage within our cultural model of a life-history.

I argue that like *bachelor*, *lie* is inherently grounded in a simplified or prototypical schema of certain areas of human experience. This, I suggest, is why Coleman and Kay found that *lie* needs a prototype definition. Basing my analysis on their experimental findings, I motivate those findings by relating them to work on discourse pragmatics and conversational postulates. It is necessary to examine folk understandings of knowledge, evidence, and proof; our cultural model of language (or at least of lying) cannot be analyzed independently of beliefs about information. I hope to show that *lie* has a simpler definition than has been thought, in a more complex context; since the cultural-model context for a definition of *lie* is independently necessary, our analysis is simplified overall.

#### A cultural model of language

Is there a simplified "prototypical" speech-act world, as there is a simplified marriage history? Although such a world has not been examined in detail, Kay (1983) suggests that the word *technically* evokes a "folk theory" of language use that assumes that experts are the arbiters of correct word-use. Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, and Searle's (1969) felicity-conditions, are constraints on the appropriateness of utterances - speakers are assumed to follow these rules in the default situation.

Kay's folk theories, Grice's maxims, and Searle's felicity-conditions all describe parts of our cultural understanding of discourse-interaction. Grice's "Be as informative as necessary," for example, is a maxim of which speakers are conscious; one can criticize an interlocutor for informational insufficiency. But informational content is irrelevant to a speech activity such as joke-telling. Robin Lakoff's (1973) work on politeness rules and Goffman's (1974) work on frame semantics show that conversation often has its primary purposes at the level of social interaction; making someone

happy, or negotiating the interaction-frame, may be a more important goal than informativeness. The maxim of informativeness is thus binding precisely to the degree that we consider ourselves to be operating in a simplified world in which discourse is informational, so that the default purpose of an utterance is *not* joking, politeness, or frame-bargaining. Our covert discourse-purposes are only made possible by a cultural model that establishes our overt purpose as informational; frame-bargaining, and most indirect speech, depend on having "direct" speech say something else.

I sketch some relevant aspects of our folk understanding of informational language-use and then use this cultural model to explain the meaning of *lie* as presented by Coleman and Kay. First, let us posit two basic principles as parts of our model of general social interaction rather than of our specific model of speech acts. These principles, which are assumed to operate in the default case (like Gricean maxims), are (1) Try to help, not harm and (2) Knowledge is beneficial. Together, the two principles yield the result that giving knowledge (since it is beneficial) is part of a general goal of helping others. Thus, in cases in which (2) is true, (1) translates at least partly as (3) Try to inform others.

The rules just proposed constitute the cultural motivation for a folk understanding of language as informational. Before going on to a folk theory of knowledge and information, one issue needs clarification: the status of these cultural models, or folk theories. What does it mean to say that language is assumed to be informational in the "default" case? I do not mean that purely informational discourse is statistically more common than, or acquisitionally prior to, other kinds of discourse; indeed, it would be hard to separate discourse modes cleanly, since one utterance may have multiple purposes. However, the informational mode is the "direct" mode on which indirect speech is parasitic; and it may be viewed as more basic in the sense that all discourse involves the conveyance of information (if only about a speaker's intentional state), whereas not all discourse participates in all of the other purposes of language use. Our cultural model presents this "basic" discourse-mode, which is a vehicle for other modes, as being *in its pure form* the unmarked mode, the *norm*.

Unlike maxims and conditions, this cultural model does not constitute rules of language use, but rather beliefs about what we do when we use language. These beliefs in turn make general social rules applicable to the domain of discourse: Grice's maxim of informativeness is the manifestation of a general "Help not harm" maxim, in a simplified (folk-model) world in which information is always helpful. Now, on to our cultural model of information.

#### A folk theory of information and evidence

Any truth-conditional semantics assumes that we can "know" the propositional content of "true" statements; this begs the vexed question of what

knowledge is. I intend to pass over the philosophers' view of knowledge and instead examine our cultural idea of what *counts* as knowledge, since this is what underlies our understanding of lies and truths in discourse.

Clearly, we do not imagine that all our beliefs can be proven logically. Nonetheless, we consider our beliefs sufficiently justified, and we are not really worried that their truth is not known from logical proof (few of "us" speakers know formal logic) or personal experience. Evaluation of evidence is thus frequently an important issue: "knowledge" is not so much a relationship between a "fact" (= true proposition) and a knower as a socially agreed-on evidential status given by a knower to a proposition.

Rappaport (1976) demonstrates just how "social" the difference between *statement* and *truth*, between *belief* and *knowledge*, really is. He observes that a normative standard of truthfulness in informational exchange is essential to ensure that our belief-system (and our social existence) is not constantly undermined by distrust of new input. (Actual statistical likelihood of a random statement's truth is irrelevant to this norm.) He argues that a central function of liturgy and ritual is to transform a statement or belief into accepted, universal truth – that is, into something that can be unconditionally believed and treated as reliable.

Rappaport is mainly concerned with social "facts," not with such falsifiable information as "Ed is in Ohio." But let's remember that knowledge has many socially acceptable ("valid") sources – and that we do not in fact tidily separate messy socially based knowledge from clean falsifiable facts. We know promises can get broken – yet certain ritual aspects of oaths and promises still make us treat them as extratrustworthy, maintaining our social norm of truthfulness. Or, take a modern scholar who "knows" Marx's or Adam Smith's economic teachings – this "knowledge" may seem to a cynic as faith-based as religious belief, but that does not prevent a whole community of social scientists from acting on it as fact. Hard scientific knowledge and evidence often turn out to be as paradigm-dependent as social-science argumentation. What is crucial is not whether scientists always have objectively true hypotheses, but that any society agrees on a range of socially acceptable methods of justifying belief; without such agreement, intellectual cooperation would be impossible.

What counts as evidence or authority is thus a cultural question. In reply to a college student's scoffs at a medieval philosopher who appealed to classical authority, I once heard a professor ask how the student "knew" what Walter Cronkite had told him. Many natural languages formally mark with evidential markers the difference between direct and indirect (linguistically or logically mediated) experience, and/or between various sensory modalities as sources of a statement's information. Some priority or preference seems to be given universally to both direct experience (especially visual) and culturally accepted ("universal") truths. But failing these best sources of universal truth or personal experience, we trust some

input more than others; and we constantly make (nonlogical) deductions based on our observations of correlations in the world. We do not bother to distinguish these generally trustworthy deductions from "fact" except when observed correlations break down and deductions fail.

Whatever our rules of practical everyday inference are like, we trust them, in the default case. Thus, belief is normally taken as having adequate justification, and hence as equivalent to knowledge, which would entail truth. Gordon (1974) demonstrates the close, complex relationship of belief and knowledge in our cultural understanding; he shows that, in adult as well as child use, factivity of verbs such as *know* is not fixed, especially if the person said to "know" is not the speaker. A theory of knowledge as a cultural status given to certain beliefs is more compatible with this flexibility than is a theory of knowledge as a link between an objective fact and a person's mind.

In our cultural model of knowledge, the default case is thus for belief to entail justification and hence truth. Conversely, untruth will entail lack of evidence and impossibility of belief. Let us combine these entailments with the informational model of language. I start with a norm-establishing "meta-maxim":

(0) People normally obey rules (this is the default case).

Our general cooperative rule is:

(1) *Rule*: Try to help, not harm.

Combined with a belief such as (2), we can instantiate (1) as a Gricean conversational rule of informativeness, as in (3):

(2) Knowledge is beneficial, helpful. (*Corollary*: Misinformation is harmful.)

(3) *Rule*: Give knowledge (inform others); do not misinform.

Our model of knowledge and information gives us the following proof of (6) from (4) and (5):

(4) Beliefs have adequate justification.

(5) Adequately justified beliefs are knowledge (= are true).

(6) ∴ Beliefs are true (are knowledge).

(6) allows us to reinterpret our helpfulness-rule (3) yet *again*:

(7) *Rule*: Say what you believe (since belief = knowledge); do not say what you do not believe (this = misinformation).

The hearer, in this cultural model, is presumed ready to believe the speaker; why refuse help from a speaker who is assumed to be not only helpful but also well-informed (having well-justified beliefs)? Putting together the whole chain of entailments, we reach the startling conclusion that (in the simplified world of our cultural model) the speaker's saying something entails the truth of the thing said:

- (a) *S* said *X*.  
 (b) *S* believes *X*. (a) plus (7) and the meta-maxim  
 (c) ∴ *X* is true. (b) plus (6)

Logically (outside our model), or statistically, this conclusion is rubbish. But as a folk model of language by which we all operate from day to day, it makes good sense - in fact, it seems doubtful that we could ever live our lives questioning the truth of every statement presented to us. We question truth if we fear that our simplified discourse-world is too far from reality: when our source might be ill-informed (a broken link between belief and justification), naive (breaking the entailment between justification/evidence and truth), or might want to deceive us (invalidating our assumption that folks are out to help, and so wish to inform correctly). Note that even in these cases, the usual cultural model is in effect: We know our interlocutor *expects* us to take what is said as an instance of information-giving. But in general, we take people's word.

The next section examines cases in which we should not take someone's word; we now look at lying in the simplified discourse-setting established by our cultural understanding of linguistic exchange as informational.

### Prevarication in a simplified world

Coleman and Kay proposed three components of a prototype-definition of *lie*:

1. Speaker believes statement to be false.
2. Speaker said it with intent to deceive.
3. The statement is false in fact.

Now, in the simplified world we have outlined, any one of these conditions would entail the others. In particular, if we assume both a folk model of evidence in which a speaker's belief constitutes evidence of truth and a model of discourse as informational (intending to be believed), then we find that a factually false statement must be known to be false by the speaker, and (if made) must be intended to induce (false) belief and thus to deceive. The reasoning runs as follows:

Premise: *X* is false.

So *S* did not believe *X*, since beliefs are true.

Therefore *S* intended to misinform, since we know that in order to inform one says only what one believes.

Further, assuming that even *uninformative* speakers do not randomly discuss areas in which they have no beliefs (people act *purposefully*), we can go beyond "S did not believe X" to assert "S believed X to be false." We do not premise the meta-maxim that *S* is obeying the rules, since *S*'s obedience to the Cooperative Principle is precisely what we are trying to prove or disprove.

Figure 2.1 gives a taxonomy of speech settings; the box on the right encloses the idealized informational-discourse world. *Lie* must be defined within this restricted world; outside of this world, the word lacks application. Only within this world can the hearer properly link utterance with informativeness, sincerity, and factual truth. The feature [+ Truth Value Relevant] on the tree indicates that the informational-exchange view of language is in effect; when truth value is relevant, knowledge is beneficial

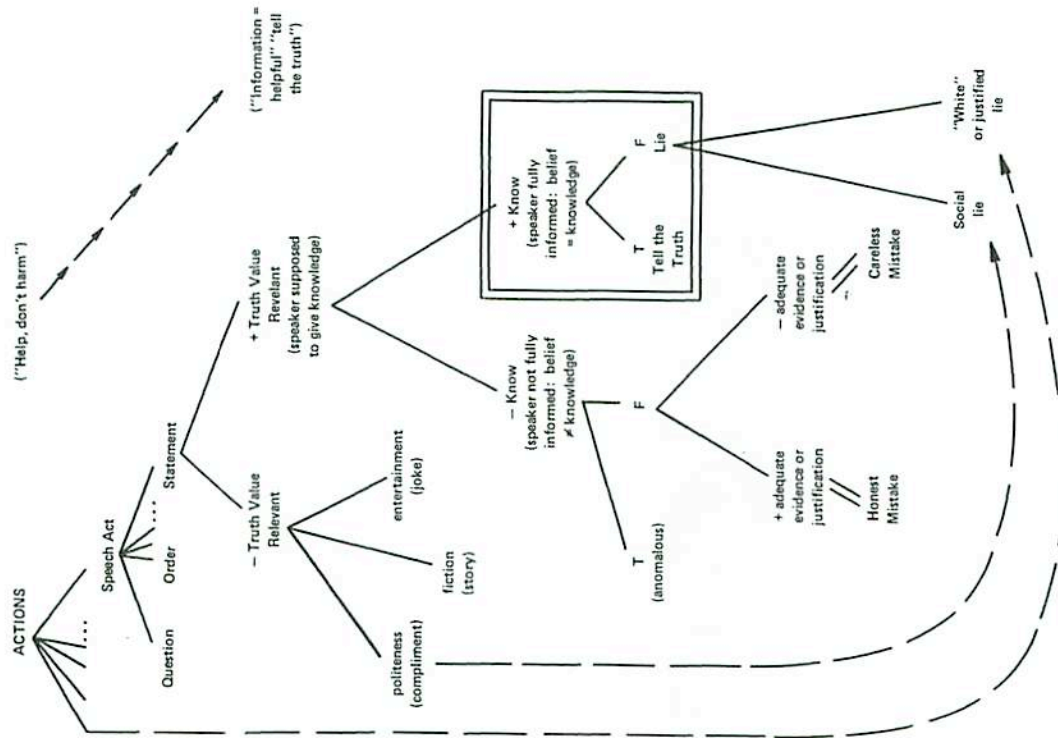


Figure 2.1. A taxonomy of speech settings

and informing helpful. [+ Know] indicates that our folk theory of knowledge and evidence is in effect; when belief is justified and hence true, the speaker can be assumed to have knowledge about what is said.

Thus, we can define *lie* as a false statement, if we assume the statement occurs in a prototypical (informational) speech setting. This definition is elegant and would also help explain why native speakers tend to define *lie* as a false statement. Not only is this the first definition given "out of the blue" by many speakers, but it is (according to Piaget (1932)), also common for children to pass through a stage in which *lie* is used to denote any false statement. Wimmer and Perner's (unpublished data) more recent experimental work shows that children up to age nine class "good faith" false statements and lies as alike, even when they themselves are tricked into being the "good faith" false informer. Four-year-olds understand sabotage (physical manipulation to obstruct a precondition of an opponent's goal) well; but five-year-olds are only starting to understand manipulation of an opponent's belief-system. The social motivations of such manipulation entail an understanding of the speech setting as social interaction. Children only come to differentiate lies from other falsehoods as they learn the sociocultural background of speaking and acquire the folk theories that are a backdrop to the more restricted adult use of *lie* as a false statement made in a certain world.<sup>5</sup>

A fascinating parallel to child usage is found in Gulliver's explanation of lying to the Houyhnhms. His definition, "saying the thing which is not," is perfectly comprehensible to him, but proves incomprehensible to the Houyhnhms, precisely because (as Gulliver says) they have little experience of deception in any area; they lack the sociocultural background that makes a falsehood a lie. Adult English speakers (like Gulliver) have a complex set of possible discourse-worlds (cf. Figure 2.1); it is not strange that in one setting (+ Truth Value Relevant, - Know) a false statement should be called a *mistake*, whereas in another setting (+ Truth Value Relevant, + Know) a false statement is a *lie*.

Thus, the simple definition of *lie* as a false statement is natural given an understanding of our cultural model of knowledge and discourse. The taxonomy of speech settings in Figure 2.1 also motivates the order of Coleman and Kay's three features. First, it is clear why factual falsity is the least important feature. Outside of the prototypical (informational) speech environment, falsehood is not particularly connected with lying (we shall see that *lie*'s moral status also depends on this setting; for now, suffice it that we experience a false statement differently when factors like truth-relevance vary). In a sense, *lie* is closer to *tell the truth* than to *joke*, although jokes are often factually false.

Coleman and Kay's most important feature, the speaker's belief that the statement is false, corresponds to my + / - Know branching: Given that a statement is false (*another* Coleman/Kay feature), the speaker's correct belief in its falsity merely constitutes full and correct information (the

informational part of our simplified cultural model of discourse). Being the first tree-branching above the box enclosing the simplified world, this feature is most important in speakers' judgments as to whether we are in that world (and hence whether the term *lie* applies). The next tree-branching, + / - Truth Value Relevant, corresponds to Coleman and Kay's "intent to deceive"; a falsehood can only intend to deceive if truth value is assumed to be relevant (information = beneficial) - not if we are joking or story-telling. This branching is above the + / - Know branching and farther from the break between the simplified world and other worlds - so it is a less important feature in a definition that crucially depends on that break.

Coleman and Kay's least important feature is the definitional one: factual falsity. In the environment of their experiment, which actively stretched speakers' consideration beyond the prototypical informational setting, falsehood does not distinguish lies as a unified class. Within the simplified world, however, truth value critically distinguishes between the two possible kinds of speech act - hence falsehood becomes the defining characteristic of *lie*, and native speakers reasonably cite it as such.

Thomason (1983) (who also tries to ground Coleman and Kay's analysis in the speech setting) adds two more features to the semantic prototype of *lie*: "unjustifiability of belief" and "reprehensibility of motive." However, he himself remarks that unjustified belief in the truth of *X* directly conflicts with "speaker believes *X* is false," which he retains; how could both be part of the meaning of *lie*? Under my analysis, the general maxims enjoining us to inform will also condemn misinformation, even if not deliberate. Thus, unjustified statements will automatically be judged as *like* lies in some ways (without changing our definition of *lie* = false statement in prototypical informative setting). Mere unjustified (sincere) belief does not, however, greatly contribute to my actual classification of even a *false* statement as a lie. Furthermore, if "unjustified belief" were part of a definition of *lie*, then even *true*, sincere, unjustified statements would have to be considered lies to some degree: not a promising result of an admittedly self-contradictory definition of *lie*. The informativity maxims give a more general, coherent explanation of any perceived likeness between lies and unjustified statements. We shall see that Thomason's proposed feature of reprehensibility also follows from a more general understanding of informational exchange and is superfluous to a definition of *lie*.

Notice how rules and maxims change form as they change setting: The general "Help don't harm" is manifested as "Inform others" in the setting in which information/truth is the most relevant beneficial factor. In the domain of politeness, the same general supermaxim is manifested as R. Lakoff's (1973) politeness rules. This model agrees, I think, with our experience: Both information and politeness are considered good and helpful (in their contexts), although in fact the two may conflict when we are unsure which setting takes priority.

A lie, then, is a false statement made in a simplified informational-exchange setting. All rules enjoining veracity are in effect, and the speaker is a fully knowledgeable imparter of information to a credulous hearer. *Lie* has a simple definition within a matrix of cultural models that are independently necessary. The prototype seems to be in the context, rather than in the definition itself. Speakers have difficulty judging whether an action is a lie when they are not sure the action's setting sufficiently matches the prototypical setting specified by the cultural model of informational exchange.<sup>6</sup> The next section fits a larger sector of English vocabulary into the cultural model we have outlined; I then go on to motivate our moral condemnation of lying in terms of our cultural models as well.

#### *Less simplified worlds, less simple words*

English has words for false nonlies, or palliated/justified lies. These words mark deviations from the simplified world of the cultural model; thus, examining the deviations may elucidate the model. Common terms include *white lie*, *social lie*, *exaggeration*, *oversimplification*, *tall tale*, *fiction*, *fib*, and (*honest* or *careless*) *mistake*, some of which appear in Figure 2.1.

First, as stressed in the previous section, a lie is not committed if truth is irrelevant. Thus *jokes*, *kidding*, and *leg-pullings*, which exist in a world where humor rather than information is the basic goal, are outside the informational model and cannot be considered lies. Of course, every culture also has a model for humor, and humorous discourse (like all speech) uses some aspects of the informational model. When we cannot decide which model predominates in a given situation, we ask the common (and intelligible) question, "How serious was that remark?" Seriousness characterizes contexts, not statements; the same remark may be serious or not, depending on context. Since interlocutors constantly negotiate context (including the predominance of informational or humorous goals), one may ask about a statement's seriousness, meaning the speaker's perception of its micro-discourse context.

*Tall tales*, *fiction*, and *fantasy*, when not referring to literature, palliate falsehoods by looking at them as literary, rather than as prototypically informational. The discourse in question is looked at more as a story (with a goal of artistic entertainment) than as facts with relevant truth values. Grandpa's *tall tales* of fifty-foot snowfalls in his childhood are fun and harmless. Similar claims in a history book, however, would be *mistakes*, to say the least. Tall tales of huge fish I caught are *lies* if we are still on the fishing trip and I convince you there is fish for dinner when there is not. I personally only use *fantasy* and *fiction* to refer to literature (or to internal, unspoken fantasizing). When *fantasy* refers to a false statement, however, it seems not only to mean a more artistic story than the truth, but also to include an element of *self*-deception that further palliates the offense of deceiving others. Any departure from the prototypical infor-

mational setting, such as weakened truth-value relevance (literary, not informative goals) or less complete control of facts by the speaker, can make the difference between our judging a falsehood as a lie (within the simplified informational world) or as something else (in some other world), such as a tall tale.

*Mistakes* are cases in which, without speakers' knowledge, the normal chain of entailment from belief to truth breaks down. Both speaker and hearer think they are in the simplified world delineated by cultural models of knowledge and evidence, but there is an unknown deviation. For an *honest mistake*, in particular, the entailment between belief and evidence does hold: The speaker has normally sufficient reason to believe what was said. *Carelessness* is charged if the broken entailment is between belief and evidence - the speaker should have realized the evidence was insufficient, but failed to. Speakers are responsible for evaluating evidence, so we blame irresponsibility where we would not blame an honest mistake. In either case, however, we assume that the rules *ought* to hold: *Mistake* marks a *disruption* of our simplified informational world's assumptions, rather than an agreed-on *suspension* (in favor of other goals), as in the case of *joke*. *Lie*, on the other hand, denotes a wrong moral choice, with no disruption or suspension of the informational model.

As further indication that speech acts are subcases of actions (rather than some separate, parallel category), note that the same word *mistake* denotes both an unintentional falsehood and a wrong turn taken, or a typo. Ideally, we should be able to justify *any* act, speech or otherwise; the graver the consequences, the higher the standards for justification. But blameless wrong choices do occur; and if we did our best with available information and resources, unintentional harm can be forgiven. The category *mistake* is a recognition of human frailty as an allowable out.

In *exaggerations*, *oversimplifications*, *understatements*, and other *distortions*, the informational-exchange rules are more or less consciously bent, rather than suspended or disrupted. Such cases do not strictly follow the dictates of our cultural model; we feel we are being less informational (less truthful) than we might be, hence less helpful. But distortions are not necessarily in direct opposition to truth; they may indicate a subjective personal reaction better than the strict truth could, and hence be truthful at another level. Or, it may be more informational for an expert to oversimplify than to fail totally to communicate with a nonexpert. Many such distortions are indisputably literally false. Whether we judge them as lies depends on (1) whether the setting is prototypically informational and (2) if so, whether they advance or obstruct the informational goals of interaction.

*White lies* and *social lies* are generally like lies, but they occur in settings in which information might harm rather than help. They are still called lies: even nonreprehensible, deliberate misinformation counts as a lie. In these cases, the entailments of speaker's knowledge, evidence, and

intent to be believed (seriousness) still hold; likewise the supermaxim "Help don't harm" holds; but the usual helpfulness of truth cannot be assumed.

For a social lie, the politeness maxims have superseded the injunction to truthfulness. Truth is seen as more harmful to the social situation than minor misinformation would be. In the case of white lies, truth might harm in some other, sometimes more direct, way: Some people would call it a white lie to tell a dying person whatever he or she needs to hear to die in peace. Some speakers would also call a (less altruistic) lie told in self-defense a white lie if it helped them and hurt nobody else. As with politeness, self-defense is clearly only supposed to be allowed to supersede the informational mode if the consequences of the resulting deception are small. The compounds *white lie* and *social lie* show in their two elements the conflicting worlds in which the actions take place (it is a lie as an informational utterance, but it is *also* a social utterance). Figure 2.1 puts them under more than one heading to show this dual categorization.<sup>7</sup>

There are lies which most people would think justified by some higher good achieved but which would not be called white lies, since their informational consequences are too major (however moral) for us to diminish their status as lies. I would think it moral to lie to the Gestapo about the location of a Jew, but I would call that an unqualified lie. The informational paradigm is fully, even saliently, in effect in this instance – it is only that we feel our uncooperativeness to be justified.

Last and least, a *fib* is a small or inconsequential lie, and thus a palliated offense, since the seriousness of an offense of lying is a function of its harmful consequences. However, a *fib* is nonetheless an offense (though minor) in that it is considered to have at most only a selfish and unimportant reason for overriding the usual motivations for veracity.

This brings us to the question of the importance of a falsehood or a deception. As Coleman and Kay observe, we can only judge major versus minor deviations from the truth in terms of human consequences. They contrast an error in the millions column of a city's population (a deception) with an error in the ones column (no deception, because it has no serious consequences). It is clearly only felt allowable to override the truth-is-beneficial maxim when the truth-violation could have no negative consequences as serious as the negative results of truthfulness. A social lie cannot be justified as polite (hence helpful) if it gravely and harmfully misinforms. When truth is more important than politeness, the informational mode cannot be overridden. This merely repeats that our judgement of a lie depends on the extent to which the relevant cultural models are in effect.

#### *Knowledge as power: the morality of lying*

The cultural models relevant to lying also help explain the generally accepted reprehensibility of lies. Coleman and Kay, noting that a lie is no

more or less a lie because of reprehensible motives on the speaker's part (consider my Gestapo example as a case of a real lie with good motives), decide that such motives are typical rather than prototypical of lying. That is, lies tend in the real world to be selfishly motivated, just as real surgeons currently tend to be male; but one cannot claim that maleness is in any way part of the *meaning of surgeon*.

Placed in the framework of cultural models of discourse and information, the variable reprehensibility of lies follows naturally. To the extent that information really is beneficial at a higher level, and false information harmful, a lie will harm. General social judgements will condemn deliberate harmful actions.

Thomason (1983) disagrees that lies are typically reprehensibly motivated; he suggests that social lies are the most common sort of lie and are nonreprehensible. I differ with him; social lies are rarely altruistic, though their element of selfishness may not be deeply harmful; and their statistical predominance is unprovable, as a valid survey is surely impossible in this domain. Coleman and Kay correctly reflect a folk understanding that deceit usually profits the deceiver, to the listener's detriment. Thomason's wish to include reprehensibility in the prototype of *lie* shows that he shares this folk belief in a deep connection between deceit and harmfulness.

This deep judgment of falsehoods as *inherently* harmful goes beyond what we can so far predict from cultural models examined; our informational-exchange model would ask us to condemn falsehood only *when*, in fact, truth is beneficial and misinformation harmful, so that the simplified world is in effect. I now turn to an examination of the cultural links between information and power, in order to explain why a stigma of immorality attaches to even well-intentioned prevarication. Let us first examine what we do in making an "ordinary" informational statement, true or false.

R. Lakoff's (1973) Rules of Politeness, now recognized as a necessary part of our understanding of speech acts, are:

1. Don't impose. (*Formality*)
2. Give options. (*Hesitancy*)
3. Make interlocutor feel good; be friendly. (*Equality/Camaraderie*)

Lakoff says (2) explains why a direct command is less polite than an indirect command with the surface form of a request or of a query about the hearer's willingness or ability to do the task. Indirect forms give the hearer options besides obedience or disobedience; the hearer can negatively answer a query about ability without having to refuse compliance directly. Alternatively, indirectness allows compliance without implicit acceptance of the felicity-conditions of a command and recognition of the speaker's authority. Hedged commands avoid assuming ungranted authority over an addressee. Without details of the motivation, Lakoff also says that



the same factors make it more polite to qualify assertions with "I guess" or "sorta." This seems a puzzle at first: Why should it be more polite to guess than to assert, or to make a hedged assertion rather than an unhedged one? Statements have so many purposes that the issue is messier than for commands, but the answer (as Lakoff at least implicitly noticed) is that a statement *does* something to the hearer, just like other speech acts. It pushes at the hearer's belief-system. An informative speaker requires a hearer ready and willing to believe, or information cannot be imparted. This cooperative hearer grants the speaker a good deal of power to push around certain aspects of his or her belief system.<sup>8</sup>

English reflects the equation of knowledge with power, in the uses of a group of hedges that mark the evidential status of statements. Some examples of evidentiality-hedges are: *to the best of my knowledge; so far as I know; if I'm not mistaken; as far as I can tell; for all I know; as I understand it; my best guess is; speaking conservatively; at a conservative estimate; to put it mildly; beyond question.*

The literal use of these hedges is to limit the speaker's normal responsibility for the truth of assertions. An assertion has the precondition (Searle 1969) that the speaker be able to provide evidence for its truth. Or, in terms of our cultural models of information and evidence, in an informational setting a hearer knows that a cooperative speaker will only state justified beliefs. However, even reliable-looking evidence can turn out to be insufficient. Evidentiality-hedges allow the hearer access to the evidence-evaluation and thus transfer some of the speaker's evaluative responsibility to the hearer. They avoid potential charges of carelessness or irresponsibility by not allowing the hearer to over- or undervalue the evidence supporting the hedged assertion. (Cf. Baker 1975 on some related hedges that signal and excuse potential discourse violations.)

G. Lakoff points out (personal communication) that responsibility-transfer goes even further. Not only can we qualify a statement's evidential status, but we can also evade personal responsibility for the original (prequalification) statement. For example:

to the best of *our current knowledge*  
to the extent to which this phenomenon is *understood at all*  
so far as *can be judged from work to date*  
according to the *current consensus in the field*

This last set of hedges makes criticism or disagreement difficult; whereas if the speaker had simply evidentially qualified his or her personal evaluation, the hearer could easily disagree (though not accuse the speaker of irresponsibility or prevarication). At the opposite end of the spectrum, hedges such as *speaking conservatively* commit a speaker to an assertion's high evidential status (another example is *all the evidence points to the conclusion that*). Evidentiality-hedges, then, allow the speaker to modify

the normal degree of responsibility for a statement's truth by qualifying its evidential status. Unqualified statements presumably take on a default level of responsibility, varying with context.

However, evidentiality-hedges have another function besides the meta-linguistic evaluation usage just described; they also function as pragmatic deference-markers. However sure a student may be of one of the following assertions, he or she might have *social* motivation to mark uncertainty with an evidentiality-hedge:

But, Professor Murray, *as far as I can tell*, this parallels Andrews' example, which suggests another interpretation.

Professor Jones, *if I'm not mistaken*, haven't Smith's recent results made the Atomic Charm hypothesis look dubious?

When social authority is low, the right to push people's belief systems is correspondingly low. Especially if our hearer may be unwilling to listen and change opinions, we have to be socially careful; we have no more authority to command belief changes than any other action against the will of our interlocutor.

Evidentiality-hedges thus hedge both kinds of authority that underlie an assertion: informational authority (evidence) and social authority (we cannot as readily command belief-systems of people higher on the social scale). This is a natural pairing, considering our understanding of assertion as manipulation of belief systems. In a prototypical informational exchange, the hearer is as ignorant and credulous as the speaker is knowledgeable and ready to inform. Who has the upper hand in such an exchange – the knowing and manipulative speaker, or the ignorant and passive learner? Teaching (a relatively one-way exchange, at least in early stages) has aspects of authority even without a surrounding institutional power-structure. To a lesser degree, any assertion has the same inherent power structure.

In further support of this analysis, note that a person with both kinds of authority can lay aside *either* kind with an appropriate evidentiality-hedge. A professor who wants to get a point out of a student rather than giving the answer may thus lay aside *both* aspects of authority, in a statement like:

But *as I understand it*, semantics is the study of meaning – so how does it strongly depend on spelling, Mr. Smith?

Too many such hedges from the professor would sound sarcastic, since it is insincere to deny the existence of one's power position while leaving its broader social presence unchanged.

As further evidence that speakers link assertion with (a) request for belief and (b) assumption of an authority position, consider the following hedges:

(Please) believe me: . . .

I don't ask anyone to believe this, but . . .

I can't expect you to believe me, but . . .

These hedges mark unreasonable belief-requests, tacitly assuming that an ordinary belief-request is just a matter of course. *I can't expect you to believe me* needs to be stated, even though our normal right to such an expectation passes unnoticed and unstated.

Phrases like the *strength* of an assertion, or the *authority* for a statement, are not random. Both social and informational authority structure our discourse world, and the strength of an assertion depends on both. If either kind of authority is extremely strong, it may overcome opposition from the other: An undergraduate who is *very* sure of a fact may correct a department chair, and a dean may feel freer than a student to speculate, having more social protection from contradiction.

Thus, our cultural model of information as power motivates evidentiality's relationships with politeness and authority. Incidentally, Grice's (1975) maxims are often cited as barring assertions that are obvious or well known to the hearer because they are useless and uninformative. However, I have not seen it overtly said that obvious statements are also often *insulting*. Their rudeness cannot be deduced from their uninformativeness but follows directly from viewing them as unwarranted assumptions of informational authority ("I know better than you").<sup>9</sup> This view may help explain the Coleman example (P. Kay, personal communication) "Crete is sort of an island," where *sort of* appears to hedge neither the choice of the word *island* nor the precision of the truth-value, but the *act* of asserting is weakened to avoid rudeness.

Conversely, Jef Verschueren (personal communication) points out to me that the idea of informational authority gives added motivation (besides Lakoff's rules) for seeing questions about ability or willingness as politer than direct commands. Question form has the inherent courtesy of giving the addressee a presumed informational authority. It is no huge politeness to assume an individual is the best authority on his or her own wishes and abilities. The contrary assumption, however, is *ipso facto* particularly counter to the rules of politeness, unless either camaraderie or unusual social authority overrides politeness. A direct command thus indicates presumed unconcern for whether the addressee *has* opinions, let alone what they are – and in a domain in which that person is the evident authority (i.e., his or her own internal state).

Verschueren also drew my attention to the contrast between an indirect but less polite "The window's open" (in a rude tone, to hearer who sees the window) and a direct but more polite request or command "(Please) close the window." Here I feel, the chosen mode of indirectness is more insulting than a direct command – the statement implies either (1) that the hearer is so unaware of the obvious that the assumption of informa-

tional authority is warranted OR (2) even greater social authority than a command; the hearer is expected not only to obey, but also to deduce and meet the speaker's wishes before they are stated (the *hearer* does not seem to mind the open window).<sup>10</sup> For me, the politeness-contrast reverses (as expected) if "The window's open" is said courteously, to a person who somehow (mental absorption? a physical barrier?) just has not noticed but might reasonably share the speaker's concern. These examples demonstrate the complex interplay between informational and social authority in determining politeness.

From the preceding discussion, lying emerges as serious authority-abuse. Authority relations structure the prototypical informational exchange, the setting in which *lie* is defined. As we get further from the simplified world in which the credulous hearer depends on the speaker for some crucial information, truth becomes less relevant and falsehood less reprehensible. In the simplified world, however, (barring major reversal of social authority and morality judgments, as in the Gestapo example), falsehood constitutes a deliberate use of authority to harm someone in a weaker, dependent informational position. We thus naturally judge it as immoral, barring exceptional extenuating circumstances.

As salient examples of our view of lying as authority-abuse, let me cite the anger of patients lied to by doctors, or of children systematically lied to by adults (e.g., about sex). Doctors in particular derive much of their authority from large amounts of knowledge that is not otherwise accessible to patients. By refusing information or misinforming, they can control important decisions for patients. To a lesser degree, any possessor of information can influence or control less knowledgeable hearers. To the extent that we feel people should control themselves, lying is immoral because it undermines the potential for self-determination.<sup>11</sup> This deep identification of lying with power abuse may explain why for some people all lies retain some reprehensibility, however good the motive.

### Deception and lying

Lies are only a subclass of deception. Any deception, in that it induces false beliefs in a credulous hearer, is a culpable abuse of informational authority and naturally liable to the same moral charges leveled at a lie. But oddly enough, speakers often feel less immoral if they manage to deceive rather than to lie straight out. Victims conversely feel that such a deception is a dirtier trick; they cannot complain of being lied to and resent the deceiver's legal loophole.

There thus seems to be a further folk belief that literal truth and *real* truth (honest information-transmission) are prototypically connected. A literally true statement thus retains vestigial legality (if not morality), even if it misleads, whereas a deliberate factually false statement retains some stigma of reprehensibility, even with strong moral justification. Folklore

gives magical power to literal truth, and a common folk theory is that law also emphasizes literal truth rather than informativeness (I do not know about modern perjury laws). Some people would find lying to the Gestapo immoral; yet most of them would think it laudable to *mislead* villains, saving an innocent victim. In any case, complete dissociation between literal and "real" truth, or between the latter and morality, is regarded as highly atypical.

A common way to mislead is to imply, but not overtly state, the false proposition to be communicated. The overt statement and the false proposition are often linked by Gricean conversational implicature; the utterance is irrelevant or insufficient in context, unless the hearer also assumes the unspoken falsehood. In such cases, the speaker *could* without self-contradiction go on to cancel the deceitful implicature. Taking a case from Coleman and Kay: "Mary, have you seen Valentino lately?" Mary: "Valentino's been sick with mononucleosis all week." Mary *could* go on, "But I've visited him twice." Part of people's disagreement about the morality of misleading (and about whether it constitutes lying) may be genuine disagreement about the degree to which a conversational implicature constitutes a "statement" and hence makes the speaker responsible for having said it. As Thomason says, some speakers are so sure the implicature was present that they include it in a restatement: "Mary said *No*, Valentino had been sick."

The plot thickens as the implicatures become more closely bound to the linguistic form. Such implicatures seem to me to be closer to statements than Mary's implicature about Valentino. Thus, I would predict that an utterance such as "*Some* of my students cut class," (used when not one showed up) would impress speakers as closer to a prototypical lie than Mary's statement.

An even more difficult case is that of *presupposed* falsehoods. How close to lies are statements such as "He's *only* a sophomore, *but* he got into that course," used of a student at a two-year college where sophomores are the most privileged students, and said to deceive the hearer about the nature of the college or the course? I personally rate these examples high. I hope in the future to investigate what constitutes "stating," as well as what constitutes lying. Our cultural model of representation is essential to our understanding of misrepresentation.

### Cross-cultural parallels

Anthropologists interested in cultural models, or linguists interested in culturally framed semantics, now ask "How universal or culture-bound are the cultural models we have just examined?" I have used English data (like Coleman and Kay); studies of French (Piaget) and German (Wimmer and Perner, above) child language agree with each other and are highly compatible with my proposed analysis of the English verb *lie*. These

linguistic communities also share the accompanying moral judgements of lying, probably due to shared understanding of power structures and informational exchange. However, a first glance at more distant cultures shows a startling degree of surface variance as to the morality of misleading or lying. Ochs Keenan (1976) discusses the frequency (and acceptability) of vague or misleading answers to questions in a small Malagasy-speaking community. Gilsenan (1976) states that successful lying is a major positive status-source for males in a Lebanese Arabic-speaking community. In what respects do these groups differ from English speakers?

My answer is that, on examination, these cultures differ from ours much less than the isolated statements above might indicate. At least, the differences are not in their understanding of informational exchange, evidence, or abuse of informational power.

Ochs Keenan's Malagasy community, while agreeing with English speakers that information-giving is cooperative and useful, has a different idea of when a hearer has a *right* to such cooperation. Europeans or Americans might think of their own contrast between "free goods" (any stranger gets a reply to "What time is it?") and other facts (e.g., one's age, or middle name) that need a reason to be told. Malagasy speakers place an even higher power-value on information than do English speakers (news is rare in small communities) and naturally hoard precious and powerful knowledge; questioners cannot expect as broad a spectrum of free goods in such a society, and day-to-day informational demands have less right to expect compliance. Malagasy speakers are not uncooperative when refusing information could seriously harm (e.g., if asked "Where's the doctor?" by an injured person). Our classic informational-exchange setting is just not in place as often as in an English-speaking community, since Malagasy speakers all know this, their equivocations do not manipulate unsuspecting addressees. The Malagasy community shares basic cultural models of information and truth with English speakers, but evokes them under different circumstances.

We might note here that lying to enemies is often culturally accepted. Many English speakers think such lies less immoral than lies to trusting friends, who are "owed" more sincerity (Coleman and Kay cite speakers who, extending this scale, said Mary did not "owe" John the truth about Valentino, as they were not engaged). In some cultures, lying may be forbidden primarily *within* the group; but such a culture does not lack our judgment of lies as harmful. Rather, their rule about who should not be harmed is different.

Gilsenan's Lebanese village is an even more complex case. He states that this community thinks lying immoral, probably for the same reasons we do. Community members caught lying lose status and *honor*. However, certain restricted kinds of undetected lies told by adult males can be extremely status-productive.

First, verbal self-presentation is highly competitive for Lebanese men,

so false (or unfalsifiable) boasts are profitable, though detection causes corresponding status-loss. Conventional verbal competition gives noninformational aspects to Lebanese boasts (though not as formalized as, e.g., Turkish, or urban black American, boys' boasting or insults). English speakers might lie competitively in other areas, and less conventionally; but the Lebanese view of lying is not in serious conflict with our own.

The second way a Lebanese man can gain status by lying is to lead another man "up the garden path" and subsequently reveal the deception. He must avoid detection, or it may be difficult to prove he did not mean to deceive permanently. A "garden path" is crucially *not* real lying, since it achieves its goal only by eventual truth-revelation. Thus, such deceptions do not show a different idea of *lying* from ours; but why do these play-lies give status?

Gilsenan explains that *discernment* is a major source of prestige for Lebanese men: A reputation for telling truth from falsehood is valued especially in religious leaders, but also in any adult male. He tells of a visiting religious leader who upstaged the village religious leader (a man with a long-built reputation for discernment, even omniscience). A village man, resenting the intruder, perpetrated and then publicly revealed a successful minor hoax on him; he left, discredited. Lebanese "garden-path" lies are usually less important, but do cause real status - gain or loss - unlike American April-fools or leg-pulling.

Lebanese society evidently has conventionalized competitive uses of informational power; men overtly gain power by forcing false beliefs on others or by seeing through false claims (exposing the author as nonauthoritative, dishonorable, or simply unsuccessful at one-upping). Serious use of this power by lying would be immoral, but one can conventionally display power without using it - as a martial arts victor does not kill but shows that he has overcome his opponent and *could* kill. A martial arts victor's status need not indicate corresponding cultural approval of actual killing or assault; nor should status given by "garden paths" be taken as indicating general social approval of lying.

Very different cultures emerge from this discussion as possessing saliently similar understandings both of lying and of the general power and morality dimensions of informational exchange. This similarity presumably stems from universal aspects of human communication. Where cultures differ appears to be in *delimitation* of basic "informational exchange" settings and in *conventional use* of the relevant power parameters. Folk models of knowledge and informativeness (and the corresponding semantic domains) may universally involve strong shared elements.

### Conclusions

A lie is simply a false statement - but cultural models of information, discourse, and power supply a rich context that makes the use of *lie* much

more complex than this simple definition indicates. Definitions of morally, informationally, or otherwise deviant speech acts follow readily from a definition of a simplified "default" speech world. The cultural models in question not only underlie a whole sector of our vocabulary but also motivate our social and moral judgments in these areas; they further appear to have strong shared elements cross-culturally.

Cultural models underlying linguistic systems are a fairly new area of analysis, though a few people were ahead of the rest of us (Becker 1975 is a good example). However, collaboration among linguists, anthropologists, and other social scientists in this area looks increasingly fruitful. My own preference for this approach stems from both its intuitive plausibility (ethnographers, if not grammarians, have long known that word-meanings are interrelated with cultural models) and its explanation of a long-term paradox facing semantic analysts. Word-meaning has orderly aspects that make us feel that it *ought* to be simply formalizable; yet we all know from bitter experience how readily the complexities of meaning elude reductionistic formal analysis. If the analyst's intuitive feeling that definitions are simple is right, then perhaps much of the fuzziness and complexity lies in the context of meaning, rather than in the meaning itself. A better understanding of cultural models (aided by research such as that represented in this volume) is important to lexical semantics: Words do not mean in a vacuum, any more than people do.

This paper leaves many unresolved problems. It is insufficient to discuss *one* cultural model or folk theory of speech (here, our default model of literal discourse as informational) as if it were largely independent of all the other models relevant to verbal interaction. Our folk understanding of knowledge also needs more investigation. On the linguistic front, in which cases can we expect the fuzziness of fuzzy semantics to be ultimately locatable in the sociophysical world (or in our perception of it), or in the fit between the world and a cultural model; and in which cases, if any, can we expect inherently fuzzy semantics? This last question can be answered only as we learn more about the relationship between linguistic and social (even metaphorical) categorization. Just now, I must be content with showing that a simpler semantics of *lie* follows from an analysis of the cultural models relevant to prevarication.

### Notes

1. Only members of the Berkeley linguistic community will understand how much this work owes to their ideas and support. However, my intellectual debt to my advisors, Charles Fillmore and George Lakoff, should be evident. Linda Coleman and Paul Kay, original inspirers of this project, were patient and intelligent critics throughout. I have also benefited from the insightful comments of Susan Ervin-Tripp, Orin Gensler, David Gordon, John Gumperz, Dorothy Holland, Mark Johnson, Naomi Quinn, John Searle, Neil Thomason, Jef Verschueren, Jeanne Van Oosten, and the participants in the Princeton

- Conference on Folk Models. An earlier version of the paper was presented in the symposium Folk Theories in Everyday Cognition, organized by Holland and Quinn for the 80th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 1981.
2. The term *folk theory*, which I originally used throughout, emphasizes the nonexpert status of such a theory or model; *cultural model*, which I am now adopting, stresses the fact that our cultural framework models the world for us. I have retained the word *folk* in contexts where I find it particularly useful.
  3. For a recent and complete survey of work on linguistic categorization, see G. Lakoff (in press).
  4. Coleman and Kay presented subjects with a series of short fictional scenarios, asking the subjects to judge in each case (1) whether a lie had been told in the interaction described and (2) how sure the subject felt about this judgment. The actions described in the scenarios varied independently with respect to deceptiveness, factual falsity of statements made, and speaker's belief of the content of the statements.
  5. Susan Ervin-Tripp has suggested to me that young children are simply "behaviorists," judging acts by result, not by intent. Before children can state their intentions, they are bound to get rewarded and punished behavioristically. Four- to nine-year-olds are certainly not insensitive to intentions but may remain behaviorists enough to class lies with other false statements.
  6. Paul Kay has brought to my attention a playful usage that seems odd in the context of either a feature or a prototype analysis of *lie*: "Do you know, I thought I told the truth the other day, but it turns out I lied to you: I'm speaker jokingly attributes to a past speech act his or her *current* mental knowledge-space (in Fauconnier's [1985] sense of *mental space*). Since past acts are not actually judged in the light of subsequently gained knowledge, we find this amusing.
  7. Lakoff (in press) comments that *social lie* and similar collocations pose problems for the theory of complex categories. A prototypical social lie is not necessarily a prototypical lie. Without proposing a new theory of complex categories, I feel it is clear that *social lie* is not an intersection of the categories *lie* and *social act*. Rather, it is viewed simultaneously (and perhaps somewhat contradictorily) as a member of two categories that we do not usually understand as interacting at all.
  8. Social rights and responsibilities are reciprocally arranged: If the Speaker has the right (authority) to say *X*, then the Hearer has a duty to believe it. If *H* has a special right to hear (to know) *X*, beyond the general right to information, then *S* has a correspondingly more important duty to tell *X* to *H*.
  9. Paul Kay has suggested to me that the rudeness of telling someone what they already know is best compared to the rudeness of giving an unnecessary or redundant gift. However, such gifts are only rude *if* they imply an unwaranted power-assumption. If I give you a paperback you own a copy of, I'm only rude if I thereby (unjustifiably) purport to extend your literary horizons; but if I pay for your bus ticket (which you are presumed capable of buying), then I'm rude unless you asked for help with change. All valuable resources, like information, confer power on their owners.
  10. Forman (n.d.), in a (somewhat astonishingly) still unpublished paper, "Informing, Reminding, and Displaying," elucidates the informational uses of apparently noninformative statements; he would categorize this as an example of informative reminding.
  11. Bok (1979) provides a treatment of the social issues involved in lying and decep-

tion. One case she analyzes is that of a woman who was the only likely kidney donor for her daughter and overtly willing. Perceiving severe repressed fears in her, doctors falsely told her that she was not physically compatible enough with her daughter to be a good donor. This deception robbed her of the chance to confront her fears and make her own decision about giving the kidney. Bok also notes that deception is less frightening if we ourselves have authorized the deceivers and are aware of their tactics. Unmarked traffic control cars voted into use by the community are less threatening than if the police use them without citizens' input.

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### 3 Linguistic competence and folk theories of language

TWO ENGLISH HEDGES<sup>1</sup>

Paul Kay

In the ordinary sense in which we say that words like *chair* and *table* are ABOUT furniture, hedges are words about language and speech. There is nothing remarkable in this; language is part of our environment, and we have words about most things in our environment. The linguistically interesting aspect of hedges is that, although they are about language, they are not exactly used to talk about language as we would say that *chair* and *table* are used to talk about furniture or, for example, *gerund* and *entailment* are used to talk about language. When we use a word like *chair* or *table* or *gerund* or *entailment*, chairs, tables, gerunds, and entailments do not become *ipso facto* part of what is said. With hedges it is different; when we use a hedge like *loosely speaking*, the notion of "loose speech" which this expression invokes becomes part of the combinatorial semantics of the sentence and utterance in which it occurs. A familiar (if probably vacuous) combinatorial semantic rule is

(SR) If adjective *a* denotes class *A* and noun *n* denotes class *N*, then the denotation of the expression *an* is the intersection of the classes *A* and *N*.

I wish to claim that the notion of "loose speech" is part of the combinatorial semantics of sentences containing the expression *loosely speaking* in the same way in which the notion of class intersection is claimed by proponents of (SR) to be part of the combinatorial semantics of an expression like *red chair*.

A hedged sentence, when uttered, often contains a comment on itself or on its utterance or on some part thereof. For example, when someone says, *Loosely speaking France is hexagonal*, part of what they have uttered is a certain kind of comment on the locution *France is hexagonal*. In this sort of metalinguistic comment, the words that are the subject of the comment occur both in their familiar role as part of the linguistic stream and in a theoretically unfamiliar role as part of the world the utterance is about. Such metalinguistic reference seems unaccounted for (and perhaps unaccountable for) in standard theories of semantics that are based on a context-free, recursive definition of truth for sentences, and in which linguistic