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Universal grammar

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First published:

December 1970   Full publication history

Cited by:

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Universal grammar

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There is in my opinion no important theoretical difference between natural languages and the artificial languages of logicians; indeed, I consider it possible to comprehend the syntax and semantics of both kinds of languages within a single natural and mathematically precise theory. On this point I differ from a number of philosophers, but agree, I believe, with Chomsky and his associates. It is clear, however, that no adequate and comprehensive semantical theory has yet been constructed,[1] and arguable that no comprehensive and semantically significant syntactical theory yet exists.[1]

[1] Or even a reasonable semantics for a reasonably comprehensive fragment of any natural language, with the single exception of the treatment in Montague [4] of a fragment of English. There is, however, a significant difference between that treatment and the treatment below of an overlapping fragment. The novelty lies in the interpretation of singular terms and verbs, and is introduced in order to provide (for the first time, I believe, in the literature; the proposals in question were first made in my talks before the Southern California Logic Colloquium and the Association for Symbolic Logic in April and May of 1969) a reasonable semantics for discourse involving intensional verbs. (Another approach is also possible, more along the lines of Montague [4]; it remains to be seen which of the two is preferable.)

It should be pointed out that the treatment of English in Montague [4] is fully compatible with the present *general* theory, and indeed, like the conflicting treatment below, can be represented as a special case of it. I should like, however, to withdraw my emphasis in Montague [4] on the possibility of doing without a distinction between sense and denotation. While such a distinction can be avoided in special cases, it remains necessary for the general theory, and

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