

WHAT DO SPEAKERS AND HEARERS HAVE SEMANTICALLY IN COMMON ?*

A. MARTINET

A remarkable thing about language is that even people with less than average intelligence are capable of using it for communication. Now, if competence, a new egocentric version of SAUSSURE's *langue*, is posited as the central theme of linguistic investigation and if introspection is considered the ultimate recourse in linguistic research, what we are likely to obtain is the linguist's reactions to his native language with the bias of one for whom language is not only a tool he uses in daily life, but the object of his professional interest. As a result of his previous schooling, the books he has read, the thinking he has devoted to a number of language problems, his knowledge of etymology, and his cultural background generally, the nature of his 'competence' is bound to be very different from that of the man in the street.

Let us take a very simple case, that of the word *table*. A linguist is likely to know most of the different meanings of *table* as listed in a comprehensive dictionary. Even if he should lack the philological training necessary to derive them all from a common ancestor, he will find them close enough to experience no difficulty in connecting them up as soon as he is induced to think about it. In his own 'competence' the substantive *table* is one and the same unit. But how will a schoolboy or an adult with little schooling fare in such a case? He certainly knows about kitchen or dining-room *tables*, and he will have been taught the multiplication *table*. But how is he to identify the two *tables*? There is, of course, no need for him to do so. He may use his two units *table* all his life without ever wondering why such different things should have the same name, and he will never encounter any difficulty in communicating with

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