

# MEANING IN ENGLISH

*Also by Lesley Jeffries and published by Macmillan Education*

THE LANGUAGE OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETRY

# Meaning in English

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An Introduction to Language Study

Lesley Jeffries



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*To Ella Jeffries,  
my lovely daughter*

# Preface

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This book is aimed at students and interested 'lay readers' who have not yet acquired a large technical vocabulary in linguistics, but who want, or need, to be able to make accurate and sophisticated assessments of how particular texts in the English language manage to create meaning. Although it is inevitable that advanced study of the English language will eventually require some level of technical competence, it is also true that many introductory books lose sight of the goal in their anxiety to train students in the formal analysis of texts. Here, the reader is taken gently through the 'levels' of language, and introduced to how each level creates meaning as well as how the layers interact in producing meaning. Although the style remains accessible throughout, the book does not avoid the issues raised by adopting particular theories of language and it opens and closes by discussing the role of theories and models themselves in helping us understand human linguistic behaviour.

Much of the material included here has been gestating for a long time and has been used as course material with students at the University of Leeds and the University of Huddersfield. I would like to thank all the students at these institutions who contributed in countless ways to the development of my thoughts. Some of the examples and ideas relating to lexical field analysis and componential analysis were developed whilst I was working as a researcher in the OUP lexical research unit at the University of Leeds. Tony Cowie, Joanna Channell, Penny Willis and Rosie Sansome should share any credit for the good aspects of this part of the work. More recently, I have unashamedly used colleagues from Huddersfield in trying out ideas and looking for examples or references. Those who have helped me to avoid more mistakes than I would otherwise make include Glynis Ridley, Hugh Robertson, Gordon Byers, Liz Holt and Cathy MacGregor. I would also like to thank my colleagues for their support in covering my teaching during the sabbatical semester in which much of this book was

written. Those friends who have unwittingly supplied 'living' examples include my children, Sam and Ella, and Lynette Hunter and Peter Sansom. Credit should go to Dave Webb for his technical expertise, particularly in last-minute printing problems. Dave, Sam and Ella should also be thanked for the equal amounts of encouragement and nagging that helped me to finish this piece of work. All the faults remain my own.

# Phonetic Symbols

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There are a small number of phonetic symbols used in this book to indicate sounds more accurately than is possible by orthography. Those symbols which might be unfamiliar to the reader or might have different phonetic value to normal, are represented here.

## Consonants

/θ/ as in *thigh*

/ð/ as in *thy*

/ʃ/ as in *ship*

/ʒ/ as in *leisure* (this consonant does not occur initially in English words)

/tʃ/ as in *cheep*

/dʒ/ as in *jeep*

/j/ as in *young*

/ŋ/ as in *sing* (this consonant does not occur initially in English words)

## Vowels

The written vowels have many different pronunciations in English. For the sake of consistency, the following symbols (relating to an RP accent) are used here:

/ɪ/ as in *bit*

/i:/ as in *feet*

/e/ as in *bed*

/æ/ as in *bad*

/ɑ:/ as in *bath*

/ʌ/ as in *cup*

/ɒ/ as in *stop*

/ɔ:/ as in *four*

/ʊ/ as in *foot*

- /u:/ as in food*
- /ə/ as in unstressed the*
- /ɜ:/ as in heard*
- /aɪ/ as in bright*
- /eɪ/ as in fate*
- /aʊ/ as in found*
- /əʊ/ as in load*
- /eə/ as in fair*
- /iə/ as in fear*
- /ʊə/ as in poor*