



Brevity (Oxford Linguistics)

By Laurence Goldstein

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Brevity in conversation is a window to the workings of the mind. This book brings it into prominence as both a multifaceted topic of deep philosophical importance and a phenomenon that serves as a testing ground for theories in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and computer modeling. Brevity is achieved in a variety of ways. Speakers use elliptical constructions and exploit salient features of the conversational environment in a process of pragmatic enrichment so as to pack as much as possible into a few words. They take account of what has already been said in the current and previous conversations, and tailor their words to what they know about the beliefs and personalities of the people they're talking to. Most of the time they do all this with no obvious mental effort.

The book, which brings together distinguished linguists, philosophers, and cognitive scientists, is the product of an interactive multidisciplinary research project that extended over four years. The questions dealt with concern how speakers secure understanding of what they mean when what they mean far outstrips the literal or compositional meanings of the sentences or sentence fragments that they use.

Brevity sheds new light on economy in discourse. It will appeal to linguists, philosophers, and psychologists at advanced undergraduate level and above.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Laurence Goldstein is Professor of Philosophy and Head of the School of European Culture and Languages at the University of Kent. His books include *Logic* (Continuum 2005), *Clear and Queer Thinking: Wittgenstein's Philosophy and his Relevance to Modern Thought* (Rowman & Littlefield and Duckworth 1999) and *The Philosopher's Habitat* (Routledge 1990).

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