Semantics occupies a more central position in the programme of this, the Twelfth International Congress of Linguists, than it has done in that of any of its predecessors. Not only is the opening plenary session devoted wholly to semantics – more specifically, to what the organizers refer to as ‘Basic problems of semantics’; at least two of the other plenary sessions – the second and the third – are also concerned with semantics, on the broadest interpretation of the term. The fact that this is so reflects the increased attention that linguists are paying nowadays to semantics. This increased attention is evident in the specialized books and journals, and, as far as the present Congress is concerned, in the large number of papers that are being presented to Sections 1, 2 and 3, and also to the Sections dealing with deixis, text-linguistics, and the semiotics of human and animal communication. On a fairly broad interpretation of the term ‘semantics’, much, if not all, of what is treated under these headings falls within its scope.

I have twice employed the expression ‘broad interpretation’ with reference to the field of semantics. By implication – or rather, as the philosopher Paul Grice might say, by implication – I commit myself to the view that there is also a narrower interpretation of the term ‘semantics’. Indeed there is. How, and to what extent, we can in linguistics legitimately narrow the sense of the term ‘meaning’ will be my *leitmotiv* throughout.
But first I must express my appreciation of the honour that has been conferred upon me by the organizers in inviting me to be the Reporter for the first plenary session. The title of my paper derives, of course, from the fact that I was invited to assume this role. Its content has been determined, inevitably, by my own particular interests and by the limitations of my own knowledge and competence; and by the limitations of time. There are many more basic problems in semantics than can be mentioned, let alone dealt with adequately, in a 40-minute paper. But I have taken care to select one or two topics, and to express views upon them, such that my distinguished colleagues, Professor Bartsch and Professor Vasiliu, could, in good conscience and without simulating for the purpose a factitious hostility, duly assume their allotted roles of opponents.

It is not only an honour, of which I am deeply sensible, to be invited to act as Reporter. It is also a dangerous responsibility. I am all too conscious of the fact that in accepting the invitation I am offering myself almost as a sacrificial victim: not to say bouc émissaire. If I do so, willingly and wittingly, it is because I judge it to be in the interests of the subject itself – the subject that both unites and divides, not only the three of us, cast officially today in the role of opponents, but all those who are attending this session.

I began by referring to the increased attention that linguists have been paying recently to semantics. Given that this is so, and given too that the brief with which I have been charged is the introduction of a discussion on the basic problems of semantics, it would be agreeable to be able to report at this point that at least some of these problems have now been resolved. Such, unfortunately, is not the case; and no-one, I think, who is familiar with recent publications in the field of semantics could honestly claim that it is – no-one, that is to say, who is not committed in advance to an artificially narrow theory of meaning, such as the currently fashionable truth-conditional theory, whose effect, if not purpose, may have been to give the impression of significant progress by generating, and in part solving, its own short-term soluble issues.

I will have more to say about truth-conditional semantics in due course. And so will my opponents! Let me for the moment just give it as my general opinion that the basic problems of semantics remain much the same as they always have been. It may well be that we have a better understanding nowadays of the complexities of the issues that are traditionally held to fall within the province of semantics; and it is certainly the case that we are able to formulate them in a more sophisticated way and by means of an enriched and more precise meta-language. That we can