

SEMANTICS
Meaning in language

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Preface

This book is an introduction to the fundamentals of meaning, as its title reveals. It is intended both for courses in semantics but also for courses focusing on meaning in language, in general. It addresses central issues in the field as they emerged within the problematic of meaning both in linguistic quarters (lexical semantics) but also in philosophical quarters in the past century (sentence meaning, reference, indexicality, etc.), and aims to foster a good understanding of meaning by combining a grounding in meaning phenomena originating from both these traditions. So this textbook tries to 'step on two boats', that of more philosophically oriented semantics and that of linguistic semantics, based on the persuasion that a grounding in both is desirable for the student, who may also wish to engage in further studies in semantics of various denominations, pragmatics, discourse and other fields of linguistics.

After an introduction into the history of semantics in chapter 1, this textbook introduces the student initially to the scope of semantics and a problematic of meaning (chs 2, 3), then to the most fundamental issues in the theory of meaning as initially deriving from the long tradition in the philosophy of language (ch. 4), and to an elementary formal representation of aspects of meaning (chs 5, 6). The motivation is to make students understand the background climate and context necessitating a discussion of main meaning phenomena, and acquaint them with perspectives in semantics deriving from this long philosophical tradition. Both the introductory chapter 1 and short introductions in further chapters contribute to this purpose. Chapter 1 also plots semantics in the linguistics map, tracing back its origin and the forces contributing to its emergence as a legitimate component of language entitled to its own separate place in the study of language. A further goal of this textbook is to familiarise students with an elementary notational system, but also to provide them with a good grounding and favourable disposition for further reading in more technical domains of semantics. Chapter 7 engages in linguistic semantics and its problematic, where meaning considerations are intra-

linguistically grounded. Chapter 8 examines sentence relations as they are grounded in sense relations, and chapter 9 presents an elementary view of meaning as viewed in cognitive linguistics.

While a book on pragmatics would of necessity have to include certain chapters on specific topics, this is not so with a textbook of semantics or the fundamentals of meaning. And this is because semantics derives mainly from philosophy, but also has a linguistic origin. So, its range of topics is really vast and less predictable than in the case of pragmatics. A textbook author has ultimately to narrow down on this wide range, and either race through more topics or engage in certain selected topics in some depth. This textbook took rather the latter option. Moreover, semantics can be 'narrow' or 'broad', 'strict' or 'loose', depending on what one wants to include within its rubric. One can include more pragmatic issues within a theory of semantics. At present, there are many semantic theories than anyone can master, and in this textbook the decision on its contents was determined by the curricular needs at the Department of English of my University, and a 'razor-bladed' perspective leading to what can be called 'narrow' or contextless semantics. However, in each chapter, as well as in the section of exercises, it opens definite windows on the complexity of issues once viewed in their natural habitat, that is, in language use at large. A broader perspective or a wider view is allowed to intrude through these windows.

The book was written for students who have been exposed to an elementary introduction in linguistics and wish to take a more specialised course in semantics. It does not include chapters on material that is traditionally included in a course in pragmatics, such as speech acts or implicature. It caters to the needs of students who take separate courses in semantics and pragmatics, as in our Department. However, the problematic of contextual meaning is present in many chapters 'shaking' in a premeditated way the purportedly secure ground of what can be called semantic meaning or contextless meaning. Especially in the discussion and exercises section of each chapter, there are exercises from real discourse, such as newspaper or advertising

discourse, that are meant to also stimulate further discussion and questions. The instructor will find an opportunity here to instil a more pragmatic-oriented problematic in viewing meaning issues and semantic theories.

The section on discussion and exercises at the end of each chapter is one of the main assets of this textbook. Naturally, exercises are meant to provide students with an opportunity to test and consolidate their acquired knowledge. However, as already mentioned, a great deal of the exercises can be used as a stepping stone for further discussion and for raising issues and questions on the theoretical solutions presented in the book. The originality of these sections is that they contain many exercises from real discourse that can present a further problematic adding to what has been presented and discussed in the theoretical part of the book. Moreover, exercises based on real data (mostly from the British press on issues of general interest and current affairs) will further engage the students, as they are expected to be knowledgeable about and interested in these issues.

This is a textbook that introduces the student to basic general theoretical tenets in the field in an impartial way. As such, the textbook is based on main theoretical sources and other books, trying to navigate amongst many theories but steer clear of more particular views and personal takes on theories. As all textbooks, it is greatly indebted to much of the literature in the field. Where possible, sources were noted at the end of most chapters, and further reading –kept to a minimum– was also suggested in each chapter. Keeping in mind the nature of the book, I tried to keep the text free of cited references that would interfere with the flow of the text. I also believe that students do not need at this stage to be exposed to a vast literature, and bibliography at the end has been determined by this view. Most chapters are to a considerable degree independent, meaning that some chapters can be ignored without much ado (e.g., 5 or 6), while other chapters may depend on others (e.g., ch. 8 is dependent on the previous chapter).

This book was being written over a period of several years for my students, most of which go on to the teaching profession. A growing number of them, however, pursue advanced studies

in linguistics and related disciplines at a graduate level. This book has both type of student in mind and has tried to balance its perspective on this account, too.

I am grateful to my students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, who have taught me a great deal over the years and who have kept me alert in the field. This book is dedicated to them, past, present and future. I am grateful to Carita Paradis both for whetting my appetite for lexical semantics, but also for taking the time to read the relevant chapters and make useful suggestions and corrections. I hope these chapters have improved, even though I must take responsibility for all remaining mistakes and more personal takes on some issues. I'm also thankful to my Department and my University, Aristotle University, for providing me with a secure job and for being generous with study leaves that helped me to finally put an end to this book. Thanks are also due to Evgenia Stratou for skilled and painstaking work on the typescript.

I must note that its publication was not of any particular interest to me, as it was made accessible in its various versions to my students, for whom it was primarily written, through the electronic teaching platform, which I have used ever since it was introduced well over a decade now. Besides, publication of a textbook for me smacks of death or deprivation, or like giving out your child for adoption, as it deprives the teacher and author of the constant active interaction with her teaching material.

This textook comes complete with its teaching materials. All chapters are accompanied by detailed power point presentations with all the tables, figures, most important points and much more, not included in the book, on slides. This material can be made available to instructors adopting the book as textbook by contacting the author.

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