

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-67187-3 - Semantics: A Coursebook: Second Edition
James R. Hurford, Brendan Heasley and Michael B. Smith
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This practical coursebook introduces all the basics of semantics in a simple, step-by-step fashion. Each unit includes short sections of explanation with examples, followed by stimulating practice exercises to complete the book. Feedback and comment sections follow each exercise to enable students to monitor their progress. No previous background in semantics is assumed, as students begin by discovering the value and fascination of the subject and then move through all key topics in the field, including sense and reference, simple logic, word meaning, and interpersonal meaning. New study guides and exercises have been added to the end of each unit (with online answer key) to help reinforce and test learning. A completely new unit on non-literal language and metaphor, plus updates throughout the text, significantly expand the scope of the original edition to bring it up-to-date with the modern teaching of semantics for introductory courses in linguistics as well as intermediate students.

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Semantics

A Coursebook

SECOND EDITION

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To Sue and Hilda, respectively
James R. Hurford
Brendan Heasley

To my parents
Michael B. Smith

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CONTENTS

<i>Prefaces</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>How to use this book</i>	xii
1 Basic ideas in semantics	1
UNIT 1 About semantics	1
UNIT 2 Sentences, utterances, and propositions	16
UNIT 3 Reference and sense	26
2 From reference . . .	36
UNIT 4 Referring expressions	36
UNIT 5 Predicates	45
UNIT 6 Predicates, referring expressions, and universe of discourse	56
UNIT 7 Deixis and definiteness	65
UNIT 8 Words and things: extensions and prototypes	79
3 . . . to sense	93
UNIT 9 Sense properties and stereotypes	93
UNIT 10 Sense relations (1)	105
UNIT 11 Sense relations (2)	120
4 Logic	141
UNIT 12 About logic	141
UNIT 13 A notation for simple propositions	152
UNIT 14 Connectives: <i>and</i> and <i>or</i>	164
UNIT 15 More connectives	180
5 Word meaning	194
UNIT 16 About dictionaries	194
UNIT 17 Meaning postulates	205
UNIT 18 Properties of predicates	218
UNIT 19 Derivation	225
UNIT 20 Participant roles	244

Contents

6	Interpersonal and non-literal meaning	260
UNIT 21	Speech acts	260
UNIT 22	Perlocutions and illocutions	269
UNIT 23	Felicity conditions	281
UNIT 24	Direct and indirect illocutions	289
UNIT 25	Propositions and illocutions	303
UNIT 26	Conversational implicature	314
UNIT 27	Non-literal meaning: idioms, metaphor, and metonymy	327
	<i>Selected references and recommendations for further study</i>	345
	<i>Index</i>	347

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This new edition of the text is still aimed at the same introductory audience as the first edition (as described in the preface to the first edition below). Most units contain minor changes in the form of extra examples or brief additions to the text that I feel help make the presentation of topics clearer. A major addition of this new edition is the set of exercises and questions at the end of each unit, which I developed over the years when I used the book in an introductory semantics course at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. In many cases they parallel similar practices in the first edition of the textbook, but there are often additional exercises and study questions that go beyond this earlier material in order to encourage the student to think about the issues from a somewhat broader perspective. The frequent practices have been kept and occasionally revised or extended in the new edition. I have not provided answers (feedback) to the new end-of-unit questions in the text itself. This is to encourage students and instructors to seek answers on their own without the easy temptation of looking them up at the back of the book. Suggested answers to most of these new exercises and questions are provided in a separate online answer key for qualified instructors (see www.cambridge.org/9780521671873).

While I agree with and have adhered to the selection of topics in the first edition, I have nevertheless tried to briefly expand or update a few sections of the text by adding selected introductory material and references on other aspects of semantics that were not included in the first edition, but which have become increasingly important in the field since that time. Consequently, I have included new discussion of topics from cognitive semantics in Units 8 through 11, which I think is accessible and of interest to an introductory audience, including additional basic material on polysemy in Unit 11, and an entirely new Unit (27) on idiomatic language, metaphor, and metonymy at the end of the book. Additional discussion was also added in parts of Unit 16 about the differences between dictionaries and encyclopaedias and why this distinction is important in semantics. The discussion of derivation in Unit 19 has been substantially expanded beyond the treatment of this topic in the first edition to include more detailed information about morphology and its relation to meaning. I have also added material on participant (thematic) roles in Unit 20, including an introduction to the roles of possessor and experiencer. With the exception of the new Unit 27, I decided to integrate this new material

Prefaces

into appropriate existing units of the text to maintain, as far as possible, the organization of the original edition of the book, which I think is quite clear and well-designed. Finally, I have also updated and expanded the recommendations for further study at the end of the book.

Clarifying text, examples, and exercises have been added to the end of each unit.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This book presents a standard and relatively orthodox view of modern linguistic semantics in what we hope is a clear, stimulating, and accessible format. Our emphasis is on getting the student at every stage to think for himself, and so to proceed through the development of concepts in semantics with the confidence and conviction that comes from doing practical exercises with them. The student should not skim the practice exercises, but should try to write down the answers to each batch of questions before consulting the answers given in feedback. The labelling in the text of definitions, examples, comments, etc. should help the student to find his way around in our exposition with ease. The entry tests at the beginning of each unit should be taken seriously: they provide a way for the student to judge his own progress at each stage.

The book is suitable for first-year undergraduates in linguistics and will probably be useful to somewhat more advanced students for revision purposes. We believe that it will also be possible for a person working independently to teach himself the elements of semantics with this book. For students in taught courses, each unit, or couple of units, could provide a good basis for small-group discussion. Students should complete the units first, and discussion can focus on developing interesting and/or problematic aspects of the material.

No elementary textbook can cover everything that its authors would have wished to cover. We have been obliged to omit a number of interesting topics, including ‘thematic meaning’ (topic, comment, etc.), quantification in logic, tense and aspect, and the relation between syntax and semantics. We hope that the student’s appetite will be sufficiently whetted by what we have covered to lead him to take an active interest in these and other more advanced topics in semantics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (SECOND EDITION)

I would like to express my gratitude to the original authors, James R. Hurford and Brendan Heasley, for entrusting me with the revision and updating of their textbook.

I would also like to thank Andrew Winnard and Cambridge University Press for inviting me to do the work in the first place.

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Professor John Lyons for extremely careful and detailed critical comments on virtually the whole of the book, comments which, in the many cases where we have heeded them, definitely improve the book. In the few cases where we have not followed his advice, we fear that we may yet regret it.

The following colleagues and students, who have given helpful advice and comments: John Christie, Gill Brown, Charles Fillmore, Gerald Gazdar, Deirdre Wilson, Steve Pulman, Keith Brown.

Jaime Lass for the drawings.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

- For all Users** The coursebook develops information on the subject cumulatively. Each unit builds on previous units, so it is wise to work through it systematically from the beginning. Skipping ahead, or dipping into later units, may work, but is less likely to build up a good solid foundation for understanding all the concepts involved.
- For the Student** If you are new to semantics, take the practice exercises seriously, writing the answers in the spaces provided, and checking your answers with the feedback given. If there is a discrepancy between your answer and the feedback given, revisit the explanations in the book to try to understand where you went wrong. Semantics is not such a cut-and-dried subject as, say, chemistry or mathematics, so there is sometimes room for alternative answers and interpretations. But we have tried hard in this book to use unproblematic and uncontroversial examples, on which all advanced semanticists would be in broad agreement.
- It always helps understanding to talk about things, so if you can work through any problematic cases with a fellow student or with your teacher, we strongly advise you to do so. As authors, we occasionally get letters from students asking us to resolve disagreements about their answers. So it is clear that the exercises provoke discussion, and also that sometimes a student needs some outside help in seeing an issue clearly. (Most of our letters from users of this book, however, seem to show that it has been successful in getting its main concepts across.)
- For the Teacher** We assume that you will be at least one step ahead of your students, and already familiar with more of the literature on semantics than just this book. This book is just a beginning. The further readings recommended at the end of the book open up the field to a host of intriguing questions, some of a very philosophical nature, and some of a more practical nature, to do with the study of meaning. Aim to get your students to see the concepts outlined in this book not just as ends in themselves, to be mastered rote-fashion, but as giving them a set of agreed-upon tools for discussing more advanced issues of meaning in language.
- Understanding the mechanisms of meaning is vital to successful human communication, so convey to your students the everyday significance of the

How to use this book

examples. Most of the time, the students’ intuitions about the meanings of words, sentences, and utterances will be sound and consistent, but they lack the terminology to discuss meanings systematically. As noted above in our advice to students, discussion usually helps to clarify issues. Approach the questions asked by your students with an open mind, aiming to see how any misunderstandings may have arisen. And always be prepared to admit that some of the basic exercises in this book are not, ultimately, susceptible to quite such cut-and-dried answers as we have given. That is not to say that questions in semantics can’t be resolved by sensible discussion, but just that the answers may sometimes be more subtle, and more interesting, than some of the cut-and-dried sample feedback answers that we have given.