

Hofmann, Th. R. 1993. *Realms of meaning: An introduction to semantics*. London and New York: Longman. (xx, 339)

*Realms of Meaning* is an introductory book in semantics, containing a wide coverage of topics important to the study of meanings. Despite being a back-dated text, *Realms of Meaning* is suitable for beginners in linguistic studies. Its content covers most of the fundamental topics in semantics with multiple linguistic examples, without emphasizing any schools of theory (formal, functional, generative linguistics, etc.). Furthermore, exercises based on multiple contrastive examples (with answers) are also provided.

In the **Preface**, the author clearly distinguishes semantics from mathematics or science by analogizing the former to a mound and the latter to a stool, with the two differing in rigidness of shape and size. **Chapter One** introduces some general concepts of semantics, namely defining various linguistic elements, explaining the relation of lexicon to meanings, forms, and referents, discerning the associations between descriptive and deep meanings, and emphasizing the importance of encoding and decoding, intent and impact, in communication. De Saussure's linkage between a form and a concept is also discussed in terms of a 'Triangle of Signification' (pg. 13). **Chapter Two** states that some words can block the usage of other words (e.g., *lamb* blocks the word *young sheep*). Certain expressions are commoner or less marked, namely the unmarked positive adjectives (e.g., *tall*<sub>unmarked</sub> versus *short*<sub>marked</sub>) and the specific hyponyms versus their more general hypernyms (e.g., *dog*<sub>unmarked</sub> versus *animal*<sub>marked</sub>).

In **Chapter Three**, Hofmann introduces opposites and negatives. Antonyms include gradable antonyms (e.g., *very tall*) and complementary antonyms (e.g., *on* and *off*, but never *\*very on*). Negation, on the hand, could mean the reverse (*tie* and *untie*), or simply 'not'

(*disobey*). There are also scopes of negation, considering *a bad student cannot even take the exam* (negating *can take the exam*) and *A good student can even not take the exam* (negating *take the exam*). The author also differentiates between contrary (when *all* and *none* cannot both be true) and contradictory (when *few* and *many* cannot be used to refer to the same referent). In **Chapter Four**, Hofmann describes how deictic or pointing words are used to relate to the speaker or the addressee ('close to the speaker' versus 'close to the addressee'). Deixis markers include not only demonstratives (*this* and *that*) and pronouns, but also verbs *to come* and *to go* – to indicate 'deictic distance' (pg. 66).

**Chapter Five** tells the difference between subject-orientation (*Pinkerton fell in love with his secretary*) and speaker-orientation (*Hopefully, the Tigers will beat the Giants*).

Subject-orientation also includes meaning stressed toward the stimulus (*This news is quite distressing*) or the experiencer (*I am quite distressed*). Requests can also be marked according to orientation to the speaker and to the addressee. By the use of *please*, a request is made for the benefit of the addresser while the Japanese *doozo* is used to show benefit for the addressee.

The first five chapters are given to introducing the relations between words (nominals, adjectives or adverbs) and meanings. The author devotes the next three chapters to the discussion of verbs – their modality, aspect, event, etc. **Chapter Six** introduces different types of modal verbs in English, including those that indicate the future (*shall*), capacity (*can*, *could*, and *need to*), obligation (*must*), etc. Generic modality, on the other hand, describes something that happens generally or characteristically (*would* describes a habit in the past). Deontic modals depict what is expected or demanded of us (e.g., *may* describes a possibility derived from the speaker's authority). Epistemic modals are subject-oriented (e.g., *must* is

used to express factive meaning).

In **Chapter Seven**, tense and aspect are discussed by introducing the SER system – S means the moment of speaking, R represents a time of reference, and E is equal to the time of the event. Relationships between SER are also presented. For instance, S and R indicate tense while R and E indicate aspect. The author then introduces the four tense systems – the preterite puts R before S; the perfect puts E before R; the present indicates S before R; while the progressive puts R between the beginning (B) and finish (F) of E. The use of SER, which may seem redundant or even hard to process for experienced linguists, nonetheless can help beginners to orient their grammar knowledge and present it in a linguistics-like manner, which will become a great accomplishment for beginners.

On the other hand, **Chapter Eight** provides the aspectual properties of events, including their limits of verbs (stative (*know*), accomplishment (*teach*), achievement (*escape*), and activity (*swim*)). In addition, volitions (*breathe*) and perfectivity (punctive *kick* versus durative *study*) are addressed. As indicated, one of the merits of this book is its conciseness in wording, and that it is written in language suitable for first-timers in semantics. Chapter Eight is one such chapter that can help students to develop skills in differentiating and recognizing types of events. The exercise at the end of this chapter can actively engage learners in recalling the types of events presented in the chapter. For instance, students are asked to explain why sentences like these are ungrammatical: *\*The nurse fed the baby some nice warm milk, but he wouldn't drink it* and *\*I learned English very hard, but I still can't speak it* (pg. 157). Students are required to answer these based on the terminology learnt but not using their intuition, as is usually done by English teachers in correcting students' stylistic errors.

Chapters Nine to Eleven develop gradually from prepositional phrase, to predicate and to sentences. **Chapter Nine** is devoted to the discussion of types of prepositions, including those that specify locations and limits of events (*in* (content) or *on* (surface)), aspects of time (*in the afternoon, at midnight*), and causal connections between clauses (*since it was raining*). The author then emphasizes two versions of prepositions: strong (*She crawled into the cupboard*) and weak (*She crawled in the cupboard*), in which the former emphasizes the ‘stress pattern’ (pg. 167). In addition, generic prepositions include *by bicycle, by bus, at work*, etc. **Chapter Ten** explains the concepts of reference, co-reference and denotation of language to real object. Two ways of predicating things are also discussed, namely attribute uses (*a tired man*) and predicative uses (*a man who is tired*). Types of nouns – generic or quantified – are also distinguished. **Chapter Eleven** links words to sentences by focusing on semantic roles (*agent, patient, goal, source*, etc.). The author also explains what constitute a complete sentence – usually one that has its semantic gaps completely filled. For instance, *son* is a 2-place predicator and its use in a sentence requires two elements to become complete. Other examples such as transitive and intransitive verbs are also discussed with regard to predication.

**Chapter Twelve** explicates the semantic components of both nouns and verbs. In this chapter, the author states that there are several ways to approach the nature of word meanings. The use of semantic atoms (e.g., [Masculine] and [Adult]) is claimed to be able to explain most core vocabulary but it works partially for peripheral vocabulary. Relation terms such as *grandfather* can be explained with sentence frame. A domination relation such that denoted by [Become] can explain both inchoative (*X learn Y*) and causative (*X kill Y*) meanings.

In the final three chapters, the author deals with pragmatic issues and other topics

unmentioned in the previous chapters. **Chapter Thirteen** introduces the concept of context and background knowledge in discourse. Ambiguity arises if one's context is different. Rhetoric markers such as topic, old and new information are also provided. **Chapter Fourteen** introduces the four conversational maxims – quality, quantity, be relevant and be perspicuous, with additional discussion of speech acts, performative verbs, and propositional attitude. The final chapter, **Chapter Fifteen**, provides the concluding remarks for the book. It touches on other semantic issues such as fuzziness, prototypes, and semantic relations. Finally, the author reiterates the objectives of semantics and returns to the issue of whether meanings and semantic primitives are actual. He concludes by stating the importance of semantics as social and mental realities, in addition to being a means of communication.

The content of each chapter is independent of material in other chapters, so that instructor can select a few chapters without fearing that what is missed in some chapters is going to affect the reading of the selected ones. In most chapters, tabulation of linguistic patterns, many of which are the author's original categorization, is provided; these tables can be used as a quick reference to the content of the chapter.

The only shortcoming of the book is the overuse of the author's own abbreviations. When students would like to apply the knowledge in this book to the study of semantics, they need to be aware that many of these abbreviations (e.g., [Awa] to mean 'not close to Spk, Adr' in which [Spk] is defined as '(speaker), act of speaking' and [Adr] is 'the addressee') are not universal.

**Siaw-Fong Chung**

*National Chengchi University, Taiwan*