

Semantics

Second Edition



John I. Saeed

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350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5018, USA
108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton South, Melbourne, Victoria 3053, Australia
Kurfürstendamm 57, 10707 Berlin, Germany

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Preface

This is an introduction to semantics for readers new to the subject. The aim of the book is not to propose a new theory of semantics, nor to promote any single current approach but to give the reader access to some of the central ideas in the field and an introduction to some of its most important writers. Semantics, however, is a very broad and diverse field and keeping the book to a manageable size has involved a fairly firm selection of topics. Inevitably this selection will not please everyone but I hope readers will be able to gain a feel for what doing semantics is like, and gain the background to proceed to more advanced and specialized material in the primary literature.

The book assumes no knowledge of semantics but does assume a general idea of what linguistics is, and some familiarity with its traditional division into fields like phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, etc. Thus it would be useful if the reader had already looked at a general introduction to linguistics.

The book is organized into eleven chapters, which are grouped into three main sections. Part I, **Preliminaries**, consists of the first two chapters and is concerned with the place of semantics within linguistics and its relations with the disciplines of philosophy and psychology, which share some of the same interests. Part II, **Semantic Description**, is the main part of the book and introduces central topics in the analysis of word and sentence meaning. Part III, **Theoretical Approaches**, reviews three important semantic theories: componential theory, formal semantics and cognitive semantics.

Each chapter includes a set of exercises to allow the reader to explore the issues raised, and suggestions for further reading. These will be a small

selection of works which provide accessible investigations of the chapter's topics. In the text there are a large number of references to the semantics literature. These will frequently be works which are too specialized to attempt before the reader completes this book, but are given so that any particular interests may be followed up.

Examples from different languages are given in the transcription of the original source, and are commented on only when it is germane to the discussion. A list of symbols and abbreviations used in this text is given in the Abbreviations and Symbols list on pp. xix–xx.

I have used this book as a text in my courses in the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College Dublin. I would like to thank my students for their responses and comments which have been invaluable in getting the text into its present form. I am indebted to Philip Jaggar, Mark Keane, James Levine and Feargal Murphy, who read the entire manuscript and made many suggestions, which improved the book and saved me from my worst mistakes. I am also grateful to those who commented on particular sections, discussed specific language data, and provided me with source materials, in particular Abdullahi Dirir Hersi, Jim Jackson, Jeffrey Kallen, Ruth Kempson, Patricia Maguire, Cathal O Hainle, Sarah Smyth, Tony Veale and Sheila Watts. I am also indebted to two anonymous reviewers of a preliminary draft who made detailed and very helpful suggestions. None of the above is of course responsible for how the book turned out in the end; that is entirely my responsibility. The first draft of the book was written while I was enjoying the academic hospitality of the Department of African Languages and Cultures of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. I would like to thank the members of that department, in particular Dick Hayward and Philip Jaggar, for making my time there so enjoyable and profitable. That visit was supported by the Trinity College Dublin Arts and Social Sciences Benefactions Fund. I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and support of my colleagues in CLCS who make the Centre such a stimulating and enjoyable environment for research and teaching. In particular, I would like to thank its Director, David Little, for technical and administrative support in writing this book and John Duggan for help with all things computing.

For this second edition I would like to thank all of the colleagues, readers and users of this book who sent me their comments. I would like to thank in particular Barbara Abbott, Martin Emms, Tim Fernando, Jeffrey Kallen, Tadaharu Tanomura, Ib Ulbaek and Carl Vogel. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers who commented on the proposed revisions. I have made changes throughout the book that I hope will improve it but time and space constraints have meant that I have not been able to reflect all of the valuable comments I received. Finally I owe my greatest debts to Joan for her patience and support and to Alexander for getting me away from it all.

The extract from the screenplay of *Interiors* in chapter 7 is used by kind permission, © 1977 United Artists Corporation. All rights reserved.

J.I.S.



Abbreviations and Symbols

ACC	accusative case
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
AG	agent
AP	adjectival phrase
ART	article
CLASS	classifier
DECL	declarative
DET	determiner
ERG	ergative
f	feminine gender
FUT	future tense
GEN	genitive case
IMP	imperative
IMPERF	imperfective aspect
IMPERS	impersonal
IN	instrument
INDIC	indicative mood
LO	location
m	masculine gender
N	noun
NOMIN	nominative case

NP	noun phrase
P	preposition
PA	patient
PAST	past tense
PERF	perfective aspect
pl	plural
PP	prepositional phrase
PRES	present tense
Q	interrogative
RE	recipient
S	sentence
sg	singular
SO	source
SUBJUN	subjunctive
TH	theme
V	verb
VP	verb phrase
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
*	ungrammatical
?	semantically odd
[]	boundaries of a syntactic constituent
[_{NP}]	method of labelling a syntactic constituent, here an NP

Logical symbols:

\neg	not
\wedge	and
\vee	or
\rightarrow	if . . . then
\vee_e	exclusive or
\equiv	if and only if, equivalence
\exists	existential quantifier
\forall	universal quantifier

Less commonly known language names are introduced with the name of the large language family (phylum) they belong to and an indication of where the language is spoken, e.g. Tiv (Niger-Congo; Nigeria).



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