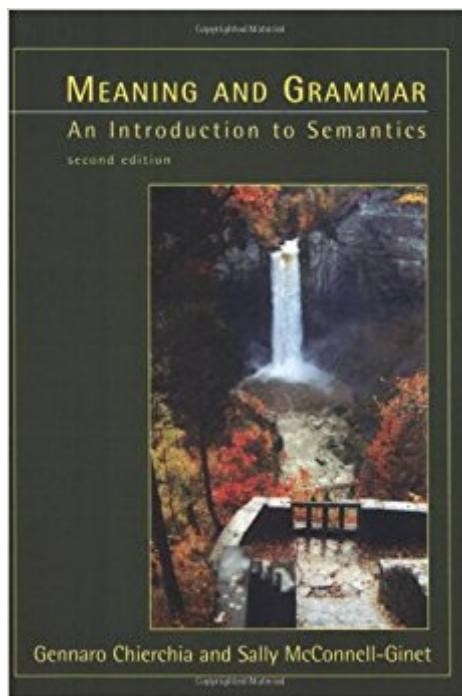


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Meaning And Grammar – 2nd Edition: An Introduction To Semantics



Synopsis

This self-contained introduction to natural language semantics addresses the major theoretical questions in the field. The authors introduce the systematic study of linguistic meaning through a sequence of formal tools and their linguistic applications. Starting with propositional connectives and truth conditions, the book moves to quantification and binding, intensionality and tense, and so on. To set their approach in a broader perspective, the authors also explore the interaction of meaning with context and use (the semantics-pragmatics interface) and address some of the foundational questions, especially in connection with cognition in general. They also introduce a few of the most accessible and interesting ideas from recent research to give the reader a bit of the flavor of current work in semantics. The organization of this new edition is modular; after the introductory chapters, the remaining material can be covered in flexible order. The book presupposes no background in formal logic (an appendix introduces the basic notions of set theory) and only a minimal acquaintance with linguistics. This edition includes a substantial amount of completely new material and has been not only updated but redesigned throughout to enhance its user-friendliness.

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Customer Reviews

Jean-Jacques Laffont was Professor of Economics at the UniversitÃ© des Sciences Sociales de Toulouse and the Institut Universitaire de France and Director of the Institut d'Economie Industrielle.

excellent condition. very satisfied

I took my introductory semantics with the first edition of this book some years ago, and was very recently teaching assistant for an advanced undergrad/introductory graduate introduction to semantics which used the second edition. It is horribly wordy and long, something which the second edition, rather than fix, worsened. Also, the book is full all over with typographical errors: above all, misnumbered references to examples and errors in formulas conspire to make many passages in this book barely decipherable. Whoever allowed this book to be published without being carefully corrected doesn't deserve their job. An online web page with errata is sorely needed. The field of introductory books to model-theoretic semantics, however, is quite a barren one, and this book does very well when compared with the competition (e.g. Heim and Kratzer's textbook).

This book is a thorough and very readable introduction to a certain semantic theory that may be called truth-value semantics and/or model-theoretic semantics. One of the authors' prime concern is to elucidate the connection between syntax and semantics (hence the title "Meaning and Grammar"). Accordingly, this book is not suitable for students who want to get a broad overview of the field of semantics (see also my criticism below). Also, to draw maximum benefit from this excellent book, readers should have at least some basic knowledge of generative grammar, the syntactic theory that the authors draw on. That said, it should be pointed out that the introduction to formal semantics provided in this book is well-paced and very accessible. Abstract concepts are introduced by means of illuminating examples. The authors have done a great job at making difficult things (relatively) easy to understand. The authors begin with an informal discussion of what a semantic theory has to explain that many novices will find intriguing and motivating (Chapter 1). They go on to introduce basic concepts such as denotation and truth, simultaneously giving a short introduction to predicate logic (Chapter 2; since this short introduction is rather dense, previous knowledge of logic might be helpful here). In Chapter 3, the authors home in on one of the core topics of formal semantics, namely quantification and scope phenomena, which they explain by drawing on the notion of logical form as it is used in generative grammar. Chapter 4 gives a short introduction to pragmatics, the study of language use. The authors insightfully point out some important connections between language meaning and language use, thus enabling the reader to see how the semantic theory outlined in the first three chapters applies to language use in real life. The remaining chapters of the book mainly introduce advanced topics in formal semantics, namely intensionality (Chapter 5), context, indexicality and presupposition (Chapter 6), lambda abstraction (and its application to linguistic phenomena such as relative clauses) (Chapter 7) and generalized

quantifiers (Chapter 9). It is remarkable that even as topics get more and more advanced and technical, the text remains clear and understandable. Chapter 8 deserves special mention, as it provides a both sophisticated and illuminating introduction to word meaning. Having praised the book quite a lot, I should point out that I have two issues with it. First, the title is a bit misleading. In contrast to what the subtitle and the back cover text might be taken to suggest, this text is not a general introduction to linguistic semantics (comparing different theories etc.). Rather, the book introduces just one approach to natural language meaning, namely the formal, model-theoretic approach. Other important theories such as e.g. prototype semantics are only mentioned in passing. Second, the book, although it is in its second edition, contains a lot of typographical errors. For example, many references to example numbers are wrong. And most annoying, one sometimes finds variables spelled wrong, e.g. "c" where the authors really mean "c*". Especially this latter point can thoroughly confuse beginners and should be addressed in a third edition of the book. That said, I think this excellent and very readable introduction to formal semantics still deserves a five star rating. The authors deserve credit for making this difficult and technical topic so accessible and for motivating and enabling readers to continue their explorations into formal semantics in their further reading.

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