

Howard Gregory: *Semantics*. Language Workbooks. London: Routledge, 2000. 92p. £9.99

This introduction to semantics appears in the series "Language Workbooks" and follows the general idea of this series: The nine short chapters informally present central ideas and key concepts of semantic theory. Many exercises allow the student to practice some of the technical methods necessary to understand semantics. A short summary at the end of each chapter repeats the most important concepts introduced so far. The book addresses "undergraduates, probably beginning a linguistics-related course, who find themselves having to deal with semantics for the first time." (preface ix)

In chapter 1 "Pinning down semantics" (1-8), Howard Gregory gives a short overview of the field: He starts by presenting different meanings of *meaning* and then introduces some crucial terminology, such as the difference between *form* and *content*, which he uses to explain *synonymy* and *homonymy* (the familiar concept *polysemy* is missing). *Reference* and *sense* are presented by the classical example of the morning star and the evening star. However, the author does not refer to Frege, nor does he present the full argument of Frege. By the end of the chapter, he introduces the classical distinction between *lexical semantics* and *truth-conditional semantics*. Interestingly enough, most of the remaining chapters deal with truth-conditional semantics, while only two present problems of lexical semantics. More on lexical semantics can be found in Richard Hudson's "Word Meaning" in the same series.

Chapter 2 "Truth conditions" (9-15) presents some of the basic operations on truth values, such as *conjunction*, *disjunction* and *negation*. Truth tables are introduced without reference to propositional logic. Several exercises help the student to become familiar with the way truth values are computed in complex sentences. Chapter 3 "Getting inside sentences" (16-22) presents the basic elements out of which we build our sentences: *predicates* and *arguments*. At the same time the author introduces the concept of *role* in terms of characteristic parts of a situation, on the one hand, and as an argument of the predicate that restricts this argument in a particular way, on the other hand. Finally, the central operation in an atomic sentence, the application of the predicate to its argument, is explained in the following way: "It holds the sentence together, both by telling us what kind of state of affairs is being described, and also specifying what individuals are required to play a significant role in the situation" (17). This explanation concentrates on the relation between the argument and

the predicate, but does not tell us how we find out the truth value of an atomic sentence. This would have been the best place to introduce the element relation as the basic semantic operation for the predicate-argument relation. Again the author offers several exercises which help to train the concepts introduced so far. However, sometimes the exercises cannot be solved without some information that comes only later in the text. For example, in exercise 3.8 simple sentences, such as "Hawaii is exciting", should be formalized. The essential information that the adjective expresses a property and that the copula is not represented comes only in the paragraph after the exercises (p. 19). This and similar experiences in other exercises might cause some frustration for students.

In chapter 4 "Meaning Relations (1)" (23-30), the author first presents the relation between sentences, such as *paraphrase*, *contradiction*, and *implication*. It is noteworthy that he succeeds in introducing implication as material implication ( $\supset$ ) in a very convincing way. However, he does not relate material implication with conditionals, which normally causes an outcry among students. Then he deduces the lexical meaning relation *hyponymy* from the just mentioned relations between sentences. Alternatively he offers illustrative explanations in terms of Venn diagrams. So he captures the quite subtle differences between *incompatibility* (*red vs. green*) and *contradictory antonyms* (*smoker vs. non-smoker*) in an easily comprehensible and elegant way. Chapter 5 "Meaning Relations (2)" (31-36) discusses first the difference between the relation of *is a* ("This book *is a* book") and the relation of *is a kind of* ("A textbook *is a kind of* book") - which I have rarely seen in other introductions and which is definitely a very helpful remark. Then he draws a very informal distinction between the mental lexicon and encyclopedic knowledge - here some more illustrative example would have helped the understanding of the distinction. Via the description of forming *stereotypes*, the author introduces *prototypes*. This again is connected to *default reasoning*, which is only mentioned but not presented in detail.

In chapter 6 "Things and Events" (37-43) the author discusses different aspects of lexical semantics. The behavior of nouns and verbs are explained in terms of the properties of their referents. While nouns can be categorized in *count nouns* and *mass nouns*, verbal reference comprises *states* and *actions*, while the latter can be *telic* or *atelic*. Finally, both the nominal and verbal properties are combined illustrating the fact that *telic vs. atelic* depends on the whole sentence rather than on single lexical item. Here one misses some references to

other common terms such as *process*, *accomplishment*, etc. In chapter 7 "Quantifier (1)" (44-51) he defines quantifiers as relations between two sets, and illustrates this with Venn diagrams. He shows that the two sets behave differently with respect to the necessity of being restricted. So the tripartite structure *quantifier - restriction - nucleus* (which here is called "scope") is introduced. Properties of *monotonicity* are illustrated by some examples, but no account of it is given. In chapter 8 "Quantifier (2)" (52-56) the earlier given predicate-argument structure is extended to include quantifiers and variables. Sentences with quantifiers are presented in two alternatives: first as restricted quantification (a quantifier takes two arguments or sets) and second in the first order logic as operators that go together with a connective. However the relation between these two representations as well as the relation between the universal and the existential quantifier representation is not made clear (it seems to me that the two exercises devoted to this issues are not very helpful). Furthermore, the classical interaction between two quantifiers is missing - which would be one of the strongest arguments for such a formal representation. In chapter 9 "Argument Structure" (57-63), the author introduces first arguments of nouns and adjectives (*father*, *fond of*) and then proceeds to the argument structure of verbs. He relates the argument structure to the grammatical relations *subject* and *object*, and discusses some interesting restrictions of the mapping from arguments roles to grammatical relation with several compelling examples.

Chapter 10 "Appendices" (64-90) consists of a short but helpful introduction to sets and functions, the key to the exercises (also helpful, but some solutions for exercises are missing such as 5.2, 5.3, 5.10, 5.13), and a list of technical terms with brief explanation and a reference to the chapter they were introduced in. Finally the author gives some hints to further readings which are listed in a short bibliography. I would have preferred a list of further readings at the end of each chapter. There are nearly no typos and the book has a clearly arranged and attractive layout that makes it easy and entertaining to read. The book gives a very informal and non-technical introduction to semantics. It covers an astonishing broad field from reference and semantic relations to central issues of compositionality and generalized quantifier theory without taking too much recourse to formal tools. Even though the informality of the book leads to some vague definitions, it is a very attractive and refreshing introduction to central fields of sentence semantics without too much formal logic.

