



An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics

Patrick Griffiths
Revised by Chris Cummins

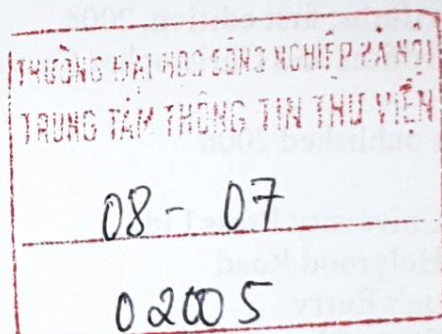
Second Edition

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First edition published 2006

Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road
12(2f) Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Typeset in 10.5/12 Janson by
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire
and printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4744 1281 0 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 1283 4 (paperback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 1282 7 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 1 4744 1284 1 (epub)

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Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	viii
<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	ix
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	xii
1 Studying meaning	1
Overview	1
1.1 Sentences and utterances	4
1.2 Types of meaning	5
1.3 Semantics vs pragmatics	10
Summary	13
Exercises	13
Recommendations for reading	14
Notes	14
2 Sense relations	15
Overview	15
2.1 Propositions and entailment	15
2.2 Compositionality	19
2.3 Synonymy	21
2.4 Complementarity, antonymy, converseness and incompatibility	23
2.5 Hyponymy	25
Summary	29
Exercises	30
Recommendations for reading	30
Notes	31
3 Nouns	32
Overview	32
3.1 The <i>has</i> -relation	32
3.2 Count nouns and mass nouns	38
Summary	40

Exercises	40
Recommendations for reading	41
4 Adjectives	42
Overview	42
4.1 Gradability	42
4.2 Composing adjectives with nouns	44
4.3 Adjective meanings in context	46
Summary	47
Exercises	47
Recommendations for reading	48
5 Verbs	49
Overview	49
5.1 Verb types and arguments	49
5.2 Causative verbs	51
5.3 Thematic relations	55
Summary	57
Exercises	58
Recommendations for reading	58
Note	59
6 Tense and aspect	60
Overview	60
6.1 Tense	63
6.2 Aspect	67
Summary	73
Exercises	73
Recommendations for reading	74
Notes	74
7 Modality, scope and quantification	75
Overview	75
7.1 Modality	76
7.2 Semantic scope	84
7.3 Quantification	87
Summary	95
Exercises	96
Recommendations for reading	97
Note	97
8 Pragmatics	98
Overview	98
8.1 Implicature	99

8.2	The Gricean maxims	101
8.3	Relevance Theory	108
8.4	Presuppositions	111
	Summary	115
	Exercises	116
	Recommendations for reading	117
	Notes	117
9	Figurative language	118
	Overview	118
9.1	Literal and figurative usage	119
9.2	Irony	121
9.3	Metaphor, metonymy and simile	122
	Summary	125
	Exercises	126
	Recommendations for reading	126
	Note	126
10	Utterances in context	127
	Overview	127
10.1	Definiteness	128
10.2	Given and new material	130
10.3	The Question Under Discussion	136
	Summary	139
	Exercises	139
	Recommendations for reading	140
	Note	140
11	Doing things with words	141
	Overview	141
11.1	Speech acts	141
11.2	Sentence types and other indications	143
	Summary	149
	Exercises	150
	Recommendations for reading	150
	<i>Suggested answers to the exercises</i>	152
	<i>References</i>	166
	<i>Index</i>	170

List of figures and tables

Figures

2.1	Superordinates can be hyponyms, and vice versa	27
2.2	Hyponymy passes through intermediate levels	27
2.3	Hyponym senses get successively more detailed	28
2.4	Part of the hyponym hierarchy of English nouns	29
4.1	Simple cases of an adjective modifying a noun are like the intersection of sets	45
6.1	The main time relationships in Example (6.1)	61
7.1	Venn diagrams for the meanings of (7.32a) and (7.32c)	90

Tables

3.1	Examples of two kinds of spatial parts	37
3.2	Distinguishing between count and mass nouns	39
5.1	Examples of causative sentences with an entailment from each	51
5.2	Three kinds of one-clause causative with an entailment from each	54
6.1	Two-part labels for tense-aspect combinations, with examples	63
6.2	The compatibility of some deictic adverbials with past, present and future time	66
6.3	A range of sentences which all have habitual as a possible interpretation	68
7.1	Core semantics of some markers of modality in English	83
10.1	A selection of indefinite and definite forms	128

Preface to the first edition

I chose Edinburgh University for postgraduate studies because I wanted to learn semantics from John Lyons, one of whose books I had read. It turned out that he was not teaching semantics the year that I took the taught graduate course, but there were eventually seminars of his that I could attend, and I read more of his work. His influence can be traced in this book. It was Martin Atkinson, a fellow research assistant on an Edinburgh University Linguistics Department project, who first explained to me how the study of meaning can be split between semantics and pragmatics. Semantics is concerned with the resources (vocabulary and a system for calculating phrase-, clause- and sentence-meanings) provided by a language, and pragmatics is concerned with how those resources are put to use in communication. My grasp got firmer when I began to teach semantics and pragmatics myself at York University (UK), and later at the University of the South Pacific, York St John and Beppu University (Japan). Finding examples that communicate a point but which cannot easily be dismissed or misunderstood by students is a valuable discipline, especially when one tries to figure out, in relation to particular theoretical notions, what it takes to be a good example.

I am grateful that Heinz Giegerich, general editor of this series, came up with the idea of introductory textbooks offering compact descriptions of English unobtrusively grounded in defensible theory – it is an approach congenial to my ways of teaching and learning. My contribution to the series aims to present a reasonably detailed first look at the main features of the meaning system of English and the pragmatics of using that system. I owe thanks to Anthony Warner for encouraging me to write the book. In lunchtime conversations that I used to have with him at York University, he several times straightened out muddled ideas of mine regarding meaning. Beppu University provided me with an environment conducive to writing. Professor Kenji Ueda, Head of the English Language and Literature Department, encouraged me and

also kindly authorised the purchase of some of the books that I needed to consult.

Pragmatics deals with inferences that listeners and readers make, or that – when speaking or writing – they invite others to make. These inferences are often conscious, so pragmatics tends to be easier to understand than semantics, because the latter is about abstract potential meanings that are often best described by means of notations drawn from logic and set theory. Linguistic meaning cannot usefully be studied by someone who knows only about pragmatics, however. A view widely shared among linguists is that semantics and pragmatics are essential components that work together in a full description of meaning. In this book I attempt to integrate semantics with pragmatics. The pragmatics is Gricean, supplemented by Austin–Searle speech acts, and making use in a couple of places of ideas from Relevance Theory.

Theoretical concepts and technical terms are introduced to the extent needed for making essential points in the description of meaning in English. Though the book is a self-standing introduction to English semantics and pragmatics, I hope that readers will be interested enough to want to learn more. For any who have the opportunity to do additional reading, the terminology introduced here should suffice for them to make headway with a range of intermediate-level books about semantics and pragmatics. At the end of each chapter there is a section of recommendations for further reading. Bold printed items in the index point to places in the text where technical terms are explained – not just when they first come up, but also to any subsequent elaborations.

Sarah Edwards, Commissioning Editor at Edinburgh University Press, provided clear guidance and responded efficiently to queries. She earned even greater gratitude from me for her forbearance in the face of my repeated failures to deliver chapters on time. Norman Macleod, as a member of the Editorial Board, scrutinised first drafts of all the chapters and read a revised version of the whole book too. Norman made very concise suggestions for improvements and alerted me to a number of subtleties in English meaning and usage. Heinz Giegerich kindly read a near-final version of the whole text. I thank James Dale, the Managing Desk Editor, and Sarah Burnett, the Copy Editor, for quality control on the text. Near the end, Andrew Merrison, doing it simply as a favour for a fellow linguist, read the book and passed on a list of inconsistencies, mistypings and questionable punctuations, many of which have now been eliminated.

Janet Griffiths, my spouse, supported me throughout and was the person most available for verification (or a headshake) of my intuitions about meaning. She checked drafts of several of the chapters and

diagnosed confusing wording in quite a few places. I thank her with all my heart. Jane Griffiths visited around the time that I finished a second version of the chapter on figurative language. She read it and offered comments that I appreciated. Thanks, Jane.