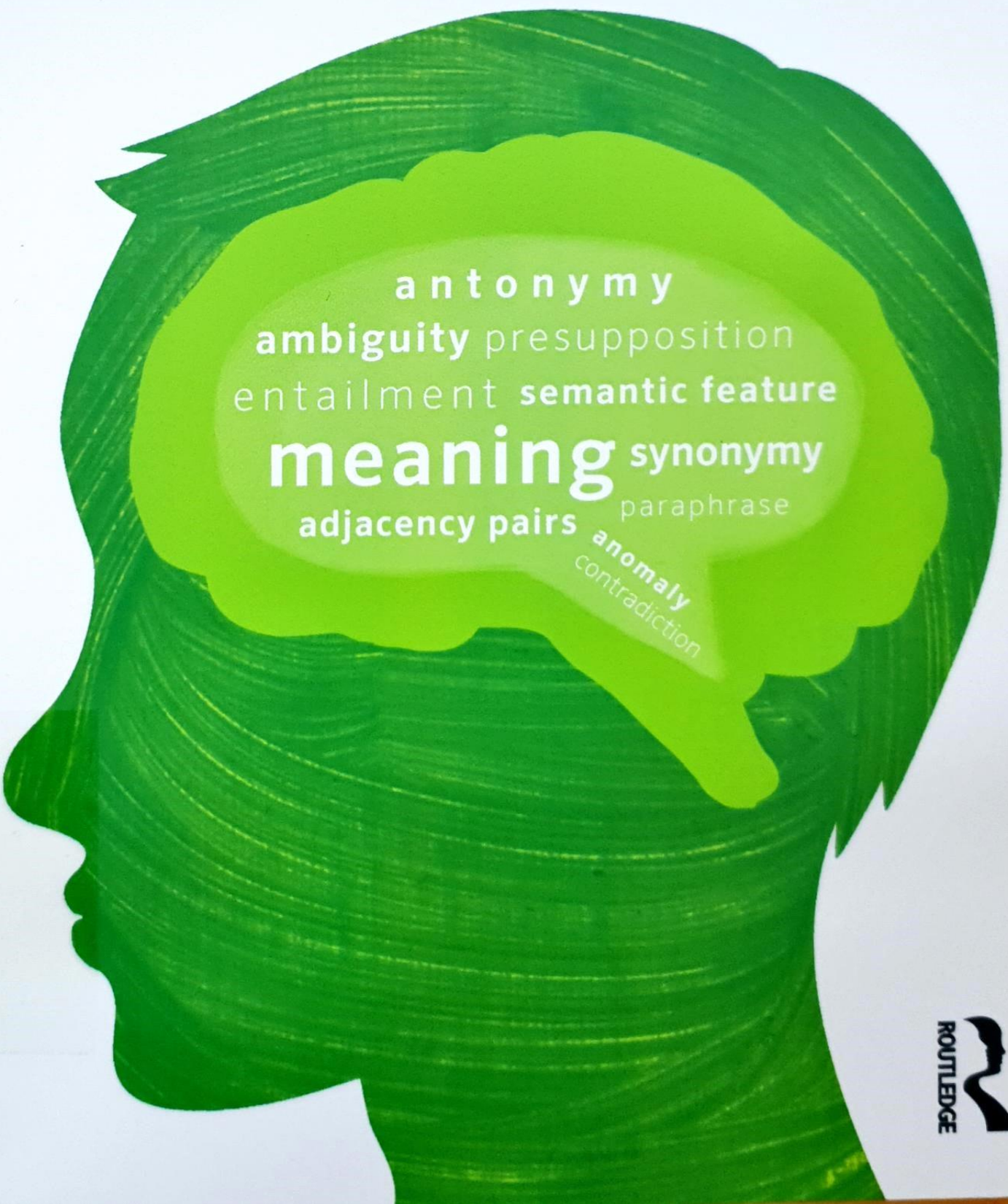
second edition

INTRODUCING

ENGLISH SEMANTICS

CHARLES W. KREIDLER



ROUTLEDGE

Introducing English Semantics

Introducing English Semantics, Second Edition is a practical introduction to understanding how meanings are expressed in the English language. Presenting the basic principles of the discipline of semantics, this newly revised edition explores the knowledge of language that speakers have that enables them to communicate – to express observations, opinions, intentions and the products of their imagination. The text emphasizes pragmatic investigation with numerous illustrative examples of concepts and ample exercises to help students develop and improve their linguistic analysis skills.

Introducing English Semantics:

- discusses the nature of human language and how linguists categorize and examine it
- covers meanings expressed in English words, prefixes, suffixes, and sentences
- examines such relations as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, ambiguity, implication, factivity, aspect, and modality
- draws comparisons between English and other languages
- illustrates the importance of 'tone of voice' and 'body language' in face-to-face exchanges and the role of context in any communication
- contains a wealth of exercises and a glossary to clearly define all terminology.

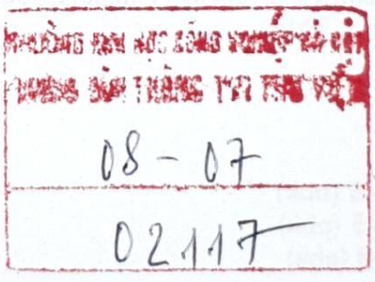
This new edition includes expanded and updated textual exercises, and puts a greater focus on compounds and other kinds of composite lexemes. Written in a clear and accessible style, *Introducing English Semantics* is an essential text for any student taking an introductory course in semantics.

The late **Charles W. Kreidler** was Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University, USA. His publications include *The Pronunciation of English* (1989) and *Our English Vocabulary* (2007).

Introducing English Semantics

Second Edition

Charles W. Kreidler



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Preface

This textbook is intended as a practical introduction to linguistic semantics at university level. In writing it I have had several groups of students in mind: I hope it will be useful for imparting a knowledge of semantics to students specializing in linguistics and that it also can be used in a general liberal-arts curriculum. I believe the text will be particularly useful to teachers of English as a first or second language and to advanced non-native students of English. Little or no background in linguistics is assumed.

As the title suggests, the book differs from any other texts in its special focus on the English language and in the attention it gives to the lexical and grammatical devices that English uses to express meaning. Since learning linguistics requires a heavy involvement with data – words, phrases, sentences, and more extended discourse – I have tried to provide these both in the presentation of concepts and in material for practice. This hands-on approach will, I hope, help students develop and improve their own skills of linguistic analysis.

As an academic discipline, linguistic semantics is notable in its lack of consensus on points of theory. I have avoided extensive formalism or an overly theoretical framework in favor of an emphasis on practical investigation. For an in-depth study of semantic theory, some instructors will want to supplement what is here. I hope the suggested reading lists at the end of each chapter will be used for that purpose.

The discussion, throughout the book, is carried along through numerous illustrative sentences that serve as points of departure for the concepts and definitions introduced. Technical terms are given in bold when they are first introduced in each chapter; these are explained in the Glossary at the end of the book. When an asterisk precedes a phrase or sentence, it indicates that the construction is not applicable; it is something that speakers of English do not say. Practice exercises in every chapter call on students to participate continually in the development of topics, mainly by leading them to examine their own use of the English language. Some of the exercises have obvious answers; in other instances it will be found that

speakers of the language do not entirely agree about some meaning, or are not sure. Here group discussion can be a valuable part of the learning experience.

Students should finish the course with a sense of what semantics is about and how semantic analysis is done; they should also have a deeper appreciation of the nature of language in general and of English in particular.

This new edition provided an opportunity to re-examine the original text and incorporate more of what I have learned from my interaction with teachers, future teachers, native speakers, and non-native speakers.

I am grateful to a number of anonymous readers of the manuscript for helpful suggestions and indeed for making me see my own weaknesses and strengths. The staff of Routledge have been remarkably kind and smoothly efficient in bringing this work to publication. Responsibility for the contents rests with me, of course.

C.W.K.