

*Realms of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantics*. T. R. Hofmann. London: Longman, 1993. xv + 339 pp.

*Reviewed by*

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This book is not quite like other books on semantics. Firstly it works with a wide definition of what could be included in the field of semantics. Secondly it makes deliberate attempts to engage and involve the reader in the subject matter, and thirdly it seems to be written for learners who are not native speakers of English. This review looks at each of these points in turn. This is a book not about how to teach languages (although the author has comments to make on the learning of languages), but about how to describe the system that lies behind semantics and its relation to logic. It is therefore a text of interest to teachers of courses in semantics, and to people who wish to be better informed about the nature of the language. It does not assume any previous knowledge of semantics. The book examines how meaning is expressed both through lexis and through grammar.

The first chapter of the book focuses on basic issues such as the nature of language, the nature of communication, and the nature of meaning. Chapter 2 looks at the ideas of markedness and blocking, and provides important groundwork for the later chapters which focus on particular parts of the semantic system. Chapter 3 examines opposites and negatives including negative prefixes, negation in sentences and double negation. Chapter 4 on deixis examines one of the more patterned areas of language, focusing in words like *this* and *that*, and *here* and *there*. This chapter very clearly shows the fascinating system that lies behind this group of words. Hofmann suggests that the similarity in patterning between quite different languages "suggest the idea that human beings might all have the same [semantic elements] from which to build words . . . It is reasonable to suspect that we all have the same building blocks of articulate thought, for we are all human beings" (p. 71). This is indeed the theme of the book—there is a small group of semantic elements that underlie the important semantic systems of all languages. Hofmann sees learning these as a way to make a quick start on learning another language. Chapter 5, called Orientations, looks at subject-orientation and speaker-orientation, and their effect on requests. Chapter 6 examines modal verbs.

(usually indicated by an adverb), and the time of the event, it is possible to make sense of choices in the tense and aspect system of English. The description is fascinating and thought provoking. It is not however checked against examples that actually occur in normal use of the language to truly test the strength of the description. Somewhat naively, it is also assumed that if the system is right, "English students should not have any more trouble" (p. 119). This indeed is the major weakness of the book. In occasional asides the author makes ill-judged comments on areas that largely lie outside the scope of the book. A similar notable comment firmly within the scope of the book is "it is probably not worth reading anything on semantics more than fifteen years old" (p. 14). This would exclude all the items listed in the further reading at the end of the chapter!

Chapter 8 examines the limits to events, covering states and stativity, volition, punctive and durative—perfective, imperfective, iterative and generative. Chapter 9 looks at the semantic elements that lie behind prepositions, Chapter 10 examines reference and predication, Chapter 11, sentence structure. The later chapters of the book range over discourse and pragmatics. The final chapter, Afterwords, touches on topics raised in earlier chapters—pasigraphic systems, meaning, fuzziness and prototypes, field, use and reference, theories of meaning, and a "usage" theory of meaning.

Hofmann clearly wants the text to be accessible and interesting. It is deliberately written in simple language with an avoidance of jargon wherever possible. There are plenty of diagrams to illustrate and clarify points in the text. Each chapter begins by posing questions about the reasons for the acceptability and unacceptability of example sentences. These questions are accompanied by a diagram indicating the focus of the chapter. The writer says in the preface, "Most of the facts of English presented here derive directly or indirectly from teaching English to non-natives, from seeing mistakes commonly made and noting how to avoid them" (p. xiii). The model of the reader then is largely someone who is not a native speaker of English and the book carefully takes account of this. Within each chapter there are interpolated questions with answers provided at the end of the chapter. They seem to have the aim of allowing readers to check their understanding, breaking the chapter into manageable chunks, and keeping the practical purposes of the theory clear. Each chapter ends with list of keywords (the technical vocabulary that needs to be remembered), suggestions for further reading, and two to four pages of exercises for the reader to work on. Answers to the exercises are provided at the end of the book. The questions and exercises largely involve deciding what is different be-

tween sentences, why some sentences are unacceptable and how to correct them. Although there are examples from a variety of languages, the writer's familiarity with Japanese and French means that many examples are from these languages. It is not difficult to imagine a course based on this book exciting and engaging students. The writer's enthusiasm for the subject and his desire to communicate so that he is well understood is apparent in every page of the book. *Realms of Meaning* is a readable, interesting and wide ranging introduction to semantics for serious students. It brings them to grips with the important issues in this field in an engaging way.