

### **Book Review**

#### *Semantics*

**Palmer, F. R. (1981) *Semantics (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press**

**Wafa Ismail Saud**

King Khalid University  
Saudi Arabia

The author of this book “Semantics” is F. R. Palmer. He is a British professor of linguistics and a linguistic researcher. He wrote this book based upon a series of lectures he had given. He attempts to provide a clear and accessible introduction to various kinds of meaning and discusses the basic concepts of semantics in his book. Palmer succeeds in his attempt, providing not only a scholarly work but also one that is quite readable to anyone interested in what we mean when we use words.

This book comprises eight chapters. The first chapter gives valuable overview of the meaning of semantics as “the study of meaning”, its nature, and a variety of views about it. The second chapter tells a lot about the scope of semantics. It deals with the theory of naming and the meaning of concepts, sense, reference, word, and sentence and the difficulties that arise from these interpretations. It outlines the basic distinction between sense and reference. However, Hurford and Heasley (1983) provided the concept of types of reference in some expressions in a language such as variable reference, constant reference, same reference, and finally, no reference, that Palmer did not cover. The third chapter deals with the relation of language to the world in terms of the context. Palmer rejects the argument that state, the way we think about the world is determined by our culture and linguistic background. He clarifies that some words have very little reality and the grammatical structure of a language tells us little about the world. In the discussion about the context of the situation, Palmer states that considering language as a mode of action and not as “a mirror of reflected thought” is too narrow to refer to the basic needs of the language. Besides, the context of the situation is not suitable for the vast majority of the sentences that we encounter. Then Palmer deals with the features of context that affect the choice of languages, such as deictic, social relations, and style which has three main features such as province, status, and modality. The fourth chapter discusses the meaning of words in terms of their association with other words, such as paradigmatic and syntagmatic, semantic fields, colour systems collocation, and idioms. The fifth chapter states that sense relations between words of a semi logical kind are divided into the following categories: entailment, hyponymy, synonymy, atonymy, polysemy, homonymy, component analysis, and the views of universality of semantic features. The sixth chapter deals with the relationship between grammar and semantics. It argues that formal categories have some correlation with semantics but “there is a difficult border line area”. It discusses three grammatical categories, gender, number, and person, and their

relationship to semantics. Then it defines grammatical relations by the position of the noun phrases relative to the verb and to one another. In dealing with components and sentence, it states that componential analysis is not a simple way to provide the meaning of a sentence. Palmer seems not satisfied with the semantic representation of predicates and arguments to determine sentence meaning. Case grammar focuses on providing several cases and defining them in semantic terms. Palmer concludes that case grammar makes a sense in relating sentences but with some problems. When dealing with sentence types and modality, Palmer argues that there is a problem when declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences function differently. The seventh chapter deals with the utterance of meaning; it discusses the meaning of spoken language, topic, comment, performatives, speech acts, presupposition, and implicatures. Palmer distinguishes between locutionary act and illocutionary act only; while Kempson (1977) states, that in uttering a sentence, a speaker is involved in three different acts, where the speaker utters sentences with a particular meaning (locutionary act), and with a particular force (illocutionary act), and to achieve a certain effect on the hearer (perlocutionary act). Finally, the eighth chapter discusses the basic concepts of logic and how we can apply them to explain some linguistic phenomena. It states that there are two kinds of logic, a simple one which is sensible, and a formal one which is calculative. Palmer distinguishes between presuppositional logic that deals with relations between sentences, and predicate logic that deals with relations within sentences. To relate the logical framework to the world of experience, Palmer distinguishes between intention and extension. He states the advantages and problems of stating the world as an intentional world rather than stating it as a state of affairs. Finally, Palmer focuses on the sense properties of a sentence as being analytic or synthetic. On the other hand, Hurford and Heasley (1983) add a third type, which is a contradiction, where the sentence is always false as a result of the senses of the words in it.

In general, the organization and division of the book's content are good. The chapters have been written to be read independently of each other. This allows for following a different sequence or skipping or substituting some chapters with more appropriate material. The overall structure of the book provides a clear demonstration of each topic. The coverage of the book has the appearance of completeness. However, here are some suggestions which may help the reader:

First, it is recommended that there should be a glossary of basic terms which includes the terminology used in this book and may also cover other terms that readers may come across in their studies.

Second, it is suggested that the writer recommends a reading list for the relevant supporting references to the texts.

Third, the book can be supplemented with Hurford and Heasley (1983) book entitled *Semantics: A coursebook* as it has some practice exercises to help students monitor their progress and check their understanding.

Finally, including the use of footnotes may help in explaining some more information for further understanding. In general, this book can be used as a reference source with each section somewhat on its own.

In short, this book is excellent for anyone who requires a thorough understanding of semantics. It provides a truly comprehensive introduction to various kinds of meanings and it supplies students with accessible and solid content. There is no doubt that this book is a major and valuable contribution to semantics.

**References**

- Hurford, J.R., & Heasley, B. (1983). *Semantics a coursebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kempson, R.M. (1977). *Semantics theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Book Review – Semantics - F. R. Palmer