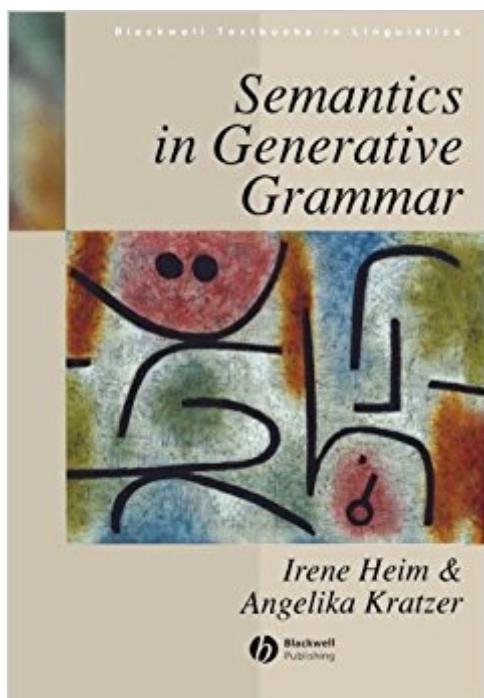


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Semantics In Generative Grammar (Blackwell Textbooks In Linguistics)



Synopsis

Written by two of the leading figures in the field, this is a lucid and systematic introduction to formal semantics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The reader gets the immediate impression that they are being invited to contribute to real work, which is inspiring. The style is easy to read and the exposition of many difficult and confusing topics is very clear. Semantics in Generative Grammar is really an advanced introduction, and is a good example of how advanced-level texts should be organized...essential reading" Jennifer Spenader, University of Groningen, The Netherlands "This elegant and thorough text will take the reader through many of the advances in linguistic semantics during the past 25 years of generative grammar. It is a fine achievement by two of the most prominent researchers, and teachers, of the subject." James Higginbotham, University of Oxford "This book shows that natural language semantics has reached its maturity. A careful and enlightening discussion guides the reader through the intricacies of argument structure, quantification, and binding, some of the very central topics in semantics and in the syntax/semantics interface. Traditional techniques from logic are presented in a way aimed at bringing out what is really important to the study of language. An excellent introduction for the linguist-to-be." Gennaro Chierchia, University of Milan "This superb new introduction to formal semantics in linguistic theory helps and invites the serious beginner to think through arguments among potential alternatives right from the start. It's a great textbook." Barbara Partee, University of Massachusetts

Written by two of the leading figures in the field, this is a lucid and systematic introduction to semantics as applied to transformational grammars of the "Government-Binding" model. It covers the fundamental constructions thoroughly with analyses, but goes well beyond that core, providing extensive discussion of quantification, binding and anaphora, and ellipsis. With exercises and guides to further reading, the volume will be a key text for graduate level and advanced undergraduate introductory courses in semantics.

If you're thinking of studying formal semantics seriously, of course you should read this book. There's no better place to start, and it's what everyone else will expect you to have read. It helps that the pacing and prose are impeccable. But you don't need me to tell you this, so let me answer some other questions. Should you read this if you're a philosopher with a side-interest in semantics? If the interest is serious, see above. If it's casual, then the answer is still yes. H&K are brilliant philosophical thinkers in their own right, and they helpfully explain their project against a background of Fregean philosophy of language. There are also discussions that draw from philosophers in surprising ways; I didn't expect such a meaty quotation from Quine in the chapter on relative clauses! You're also going to want to know about sets, lambdas, and natural language quantifiers, which H&K will teach you in no time. Less helpful, but equally delightful, is the excursus on predicate logic. There are a few unsatisfying things about this book's project, which is to make mathy languages that look like natural languages and show how sentences get their meanings from words. How is a semantic theory supposed to hook up to a theory of psychology? How are the basic elements of a semantic theory of English—e.g., "dog"—realized in an Anglophone's brain? Do we even know what the prospects are for answering these questions? These are big, hard questions that no one knows how to answer (or so say my friendly neighborhood cognitive scientists). One can't fault H&K for failing to settle them in an intro book! The fact is that, whatever problems formal semantics faces, it's already made enormous progress, and an excellent way to catch up with the action is to read H&K. The only problems the book faces on its own terms, that I know of, have to do with chapter three (on theta roles and such), which isn't the best treatment of the subject, but isn't an integral part of the book, anyway. Full disclosure: as you can probably tell, I'm a philosopher, not a linguist! I've just taken a couple of graduate seminars on formal semantics and read papers in my spare time. But I can tell you that I found this book extraordinarily engaging, fun, and deep—not to mention useful. If you're a student of my background, you might have a similar experience.

Thank you

This would probably serve as an excellent review for those who have studied semantics and need to be reminded/updated on important topics. As a textbook for novices, though, it is very poor. The text is not written with ease of reading in mind (technical formulas are frequently used to explain points that would be much better explained in words). Technical terms are used without definitions, and the exercises require the reader to have not only understood the material completely, but to have read between the lines and filled in the gaps in the explanations. There are many typos and there are structural problems as well (use of endnotes instead of footnotes, no comprehensive bibliography...). If you have already done quite a lot of semantics, this book may be of use to you; if you are thinking of using it as a class text or as a way to teach yourself this subject, look elsewhere.

This is a must-read for anyone with an advanced interest in semantics/syntax. If you're looking for an introduction to semantics and have no background at all, I'd combine this book with for instance De Swart's introduction to semantics. This text is suitable for graduate students.

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