

Review for Studies in Informatics and Control (Romania)

SEMANTIC RELATIONS AND THE LEXICON

M. Lynne Murphy

Cambridge University Press, 2003, 292 p. + ix

ISBN 0 521 78067 5

Price £45.00 (US\$65.00)

A new book on semantic relations? Is there anything left to be said on this topic? Lynne Murphy gives a positive answer to these questions. The novelty of her approach comes from the interdisciplinary perspective she adopts.

The book is structured in two parts: the first one makes some terminological specifications and gives the main features of the theory proposed here, alongside with a comparison with the existing ones; the second part dedicates one chapter to the treatment of synonymy and one to antonymy, showing how they are accounted for within this perspective; another chapter pleads for a different treatment of hyponymy/hyperonymy, meronymy and other relations.

The author tries to provide a solution to the problem of how individuals know or determine whether words are semantically related and, if they are, what type of relation is involved. Her point is that such knowledge is metalexical in nature (i.e. it is information about words that is not stored in the lexicon, as it is not considered relevant to linguistic competence, is context dependent and predictable by means of a single relational principle; thus it is conceptual knowledge about words, not lexical knowledge of words).

This approach aims at being viable for all semantic relations and at complying with all their characteristics: productivity, binarity, variability, prototypicality, canonicity, semi-semanticity, uncountability, predictability, and universality. Postulating Contrast as a general category for all semantic relations, the author claims that the Relation by Contrast Principle (p. 44) can be used to define them; all semantic relations have in common the fact that they relate items that are similar in all but one respect.

Although making the aim of the third chapter in Part I, comparing and contrasting of the proposed theory with the existing ones on semantic relations are very frequent in this book and also very useful for the reader.

Part II takes (the most important) semantic relations in turn in order to present their treatment along the lines of the metalexical treatment proposed in the first part and to make a comparison with other treatments; their logical properties and classifications from different perspective are discussed.

An adapted form of the Relation by Contrast Principle is given to account for synonymy and antonymy. In case of the former, it specifies that in order to be considered synonymous, two word-concepts have the same contextually relevant properties, but differ in form. In case of the latter, it specifies the need for the identity of all but one contextually relevant semantic property.

Hyponymy, meronymy and other relations are not considered to link concepts of words, but they are relations among the things (or concepts) those words denote. If there

are (rare) cases when lexical forms are in hyponymic, etc. relations, then the version of the Relation by Contrast Principle accounting for antonyms also accounts for them.

The closing chapter is a summary of the whole book and places the metalexical approach among others, also underlying possible shortcomings.

There is an appendix containing relation elements and a rich bibliography, relevant for the topics touched throughout the book.

The addressees of *Lexical relations and the Lexicon* are linguists and cognitive scientists. The author stresses the need for such interdisciplinary approaches, as “linguistic phenomena cross boundaries between the linguistic, the conceptual, and the communicative” (p. 242).

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