



Knowledge of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantic Theory

Richard K. Larson, Gabriel M.A. Segal

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Current textbooks in formal semantics are all versions of, or introductions to, the same paradigm in semantic theory: Montague Grammar. *Knowledge of Meaning* is based on different assumptions and a different history. It provides the only introduction to truth-theoretic semantics for natural languages, fully integrating semantic theory into the modern Chomskyan program in linguistic theory and connecting linguistic semantics to research elsewhere in cognitive psychology and philosophy. As such, it better fits into a modern graduate or undergraduate program in linguistics, cognitive science, or philosophy. Furthermore, since the technical tools it employs are much simpler to teach and to master, *Knowledge of Meaning* can be taught by someone who is not primarily a semanticist.

Linguistic semantics cannot be studied as a stand-alone subject but only as part of cognitive psychology, the authors assert. It is the study of a particular human cognitive competence governing the meanings of words and phrases. Larson and Segal argue that speakers have unconscious knowledge of the semantic rules of their language, and they present concrete, empirically motivated proposals about a formal theory of this competence based on the work of Alfred Tarski and Donald Davidson. The theory is extended to a wide range of constructions occurring in natural language, including predicates, proper nouns, pronouns and demonstratives, quantifiers, definite descriptions, anaphoric expressions, clausal complements, and adverbs.

Knowledge of Meaning gives equal weight to philosophical, empirical, and formal discussions. It addresses not only the empirical issues of linguistic semantics but also its fundamental conceptual questions, including the relation of truth to meaning and the methodology of semantic theorizing. Numerous exercises are included in the book.

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