

Katarina Rasulić, *Exploring Semantic Relations*, Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, 2016, pp. 376.

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Among the core elements of the linguistics curriculum, semantics has come to stand out in the striking theoretical disagreements over the field's most basic concepts. The diversity of approaches that emphasize distinction from each other rather than interrelatedness, to an extent becoming emblematic of many areas of linguistics today, means that writing an introductory semantics textbook increasingly involves the risk of making it either too dense or too piecemeal and selective to give the full picture of the field's complexity. Katarina Rasulić's *Exploring Semantic Relations* is unique precisely in the way it avoids both of these traps. The book presents a theoretically integrative, yet highly accessible introduction to the basic concepts in semantics, with an overview of semantic relations and a detailed treatment of lexical semantic relations in particular. The work is primarily designed as a companion to standard textbooks on English semantics and is intended for advanced university EFL students, but is useful for a more general audience, both for those encountering linguistic semantics topics for the first time and those already familiar with the field wishing to gain further insight into its specific aspects.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, consisting of four chapters (pp. 3-124), provides a general overview of semantic relations and introduces the basic semantics concepts. Part II, composed of six chapters (pp. 125-330), focuses on lexical semantic relations. In both parts, each chapter ends with a summary of relevant keywords and a set of exercises and study questions.

Part I presents an introductory account of semantic relations, most notably the two broad types fundamental to the study of meaning: lexical and propositional semantic relations. Before these are discussed, Chapter 1 sets out the theme of the book by offering the reader a taste of the field and its various practical applications. Chapter 2 then introduces lexical semantic relations, including form-meaning relations and paradigmatic / syntagmatic relations. The traditionally difficult "lumper vs. splitter" (cf. Evens 1998) issue of classifying lexical semantic relations beyond the paradigmatic-syntagmatic distinction is discussed and exemplified via some notable divergent approaches. The discussion is kept minimal, in line with the book's purpose, but is illustrative of the complex nature of lexical semantic relations. Chapter 3 turns to propositional semantic relations, starting with a general introduction to the notions of propositions and truth relations. The chapter lays out the basics of truth functions and propositional calculus, introducing truth-tables in a concise and gradual manner. It is emphasized that propositional truth functions play a major role in deductive reasoning, and special attention in this respect is paid to argument validity and logical fallacies.

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Subsequently, the chapter also discusses propositional relations based on entailment and presupposition, drawing on the previous account of truth values. Finally, since semantic relatedness goes beyond lexical and propositional meaning, Part I is rounded off with a brief discussion of semantic relatedness at the level of text/discourse, presented in Chapter 4. This general introductory account thus closes by stressing an important standpoint underlying the approach in the whole book – that the relatedness of meaning is integral to meaning construction at all levels of language structure and use.

Part II, true to its title, zooms in on lexical semantic relations, with most space dedicated to the four major paradigmatic relations introduced in Part I. Chapter 5 explores the relation of synonymy, including absolute and relative synonymy, as well as the role of lexical synonyms in propositional meaning (introducing the notions of cognitive synonymy and near synonymy). This nuanced attention to the interrelatedness of lexical semantic and propositional semantic relations is an important feature of this and all the other chapters in Part II. Chapter 6, dedicated to antonymy, opens by stressing the special cognitive salience of this type of relation, reflecting what appears to be a general human tendency to categorize experience by dichotomous contrast (Lyons 1977). Again, attention is drawn to the interrelatedness of lexical and propositional semantic relations, showing how this bears on the type of antonymy encoded in antonym pairs. Chapter 7 deals with hyponymy, with particular attention devoted to hyponymy and deductive reasoning. The chapter also demonstrates the intrinsic links between hyponymy and the basic principles of categorization and classification. Chapter 8 discusses meronymy, one type of relation that is often left out or just briefly mentioned in lexical semantics textbooks. Still, citing existing evidence and presenting relevant examples, the author makes a good case for seeing meronymy as a conceptually and linguistically distinct type of semantic relation.

The final two chapters in Part II, Chapter 9 and Chapter 10, are particularly theoretically significant, as they address some less commonly discussed aspects of lexical semantic relations. Chapter 9 draws attention to the ubiquity of relations not covered by the common “nym” groupings (e.g. *writer* : *pen*, or *joke* : *laughter*). While such relations have not received particular attention in standard linguistic semantics textbooks, Rasulić stresses the important role they play in the overall semantic and conceptual organization. Without attempting to be exhaustive, she outlines several types of ‘non-standard’ lexical semantic relations, selected for their cognitive and linguistic import. Finally, Chapter 10 dedicates some attention to the cognitive process of analogy and stresses the ways in which verbal analogies can highlight different aspects of semantic relatedness. In particular, the discussion in this chapter points to the synergy of meta-linguistic knowledge of semantic relations and verbal analogical reasoning. Importantly, both of these final chapters underscore the need to characterize meaning with respect to background conceptual knowledge structures (cf. Fillmore 1982, Langacker 1987), reflecting a conception of meaning that more subtly underlies the treatment of semantic relations in the entire book. This perspective, in line with cognitive-linguistic accounts of semantic representation and Rasulić’s own scholarly background, is seen to provide a coherent frame for understanding the “many faces of semantic relations” (xi) operating across all levels of language.

On the whole, what makes this book particularly valuable is not just its theoretically integrative approach and accent on semantic relatedness across linguistic levels (certainly a much needed and laudable effort), but its practicality as a didactic resource. The author never loses sight of her pedagogical purpose and explanations are kept uncomplicated throughout, an important concern given the complexity of the issues covered. The exercises and study questions that follow each chapter allow deeper engagement with the subject, especially as they involve different levels of difficulty and are based on a variety of stimulating sources, such as cartoons, newspapers, blogs and modern poetry. Together with the keyword summaries, these provide an efficient way to revise and master the most basic concepts. For those who become more curious about the subject, the in-chapter examples and subsequent exercises surely inspire further exploration by reflecting the many possible practical applications of linguistic semantics.

In conclusion, in the multitude of increasingly opaque semantics textbooks, *Exploring Semantic Relations* is a refreshing newcomer. It successfully achieves the goal of presenting a comprehensive, balanced and practical introduction to semantic relations and their manifestations in the English language, and will undoubtedly serve as a valuable resource for students, teachers and researchers. Still, as it is likely to be most valued by students coming to linguistic semantics for the first time, we can at this point venture to offer the book an early welcome in the name of those it is yet to inspire to explore the exciting subject of meaning in language and thought.