

# Semantics: A Coursebook

## Chapter 1: Basic Ideas in Semantics

### Unit 1: About Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning in language.

First, we note the distinction between a *person* meaning (or intending) something [*speaker meaning*], and a *word* meaning (being equivalent to) something [*word meaning*].

Meaningless cannot be equated with informativeness all the time – words may be spoken for purely social reasons. Further, even giving information may be for social reasons (if the listener has no particular need for the information).

### Unit 2: Sentences, Utterances, and Propositions

An *utterance* is any stretch of talk by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person.

A *sentence* is neither a physical event nor a physical object – it is an abstract string of words put together by the grammatical rules of a language.

Semantics is concerned with the meanings of all utterances, but it is convenient for us to start our analysis with whole sentences only.

A *proposition* is that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which declares some state of affairs.

Propositions can be mentioned without being asserted, as in interrogatives and imperatives.

### Unit 3: Reference and Sense

*Reference* indicates what things in the world the speaker is talking about. It is the relation between an expression in a language and a real-world object (a *referent*).

Expressions can have *variable* or *constant* reference.

The *sense* of an expression, on the other hand, is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in a language. The sense of an expression is distinct from its reference; it is an abstraction. All meaningful expressions have sense, but may not have reference.