

Małgorzata Fabiszak, ed. (2007) *Language and Meaning: Cognitive and Functional Perspectives*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. Pp. 344.

Reviewed by Heli Tissari

Having just begun to teach a course titled “Lexis in Present-Day English” with a colleague, this book seemed a very good choice for me to review. It addresses exactly the kind of issues that I would like our students to think about: What is meaning? What is the difference between semantics and lexicography? Between a word and a concept? How do we categorise? What kind of information do dictionaries contain? This collection of articles originated at the 36th Poznań Linguistic Meeting in May 2005, which was attended by “linguists, lexicographers, translation studies theorists and practitioners, a psycholinguist and a philosopher” (p. 7). It includes eighteen contributions by mainly Polish authors, with a few exceptions.

The first and potentially leading article is by Enrique Bernárdez, who is also the first in alphabetical order. He writes on “synergy in the construction of meaning” (pp. 15–37), advocating a “kind of distributed cognition with an essential historical element” (p. 27). In other words, he wishes to see meaning created not only in and by individual brains, but through people’s interaction with each other and their environment and, moreover, developing over time. Similar ideas are also embraced by Karolina Krawczak in “Meaning as an epiphenomenon of cognition, social interaction and intercognition” (pp. 187–198) and Maria Pilar Lema Quintana and Juana Teresa Guerra de la Torre in “A study of meaning construction across cultures: An epistemological framework for cognitive translation studies” (pp. 199–216).

Apart from Bernárdez, other potentially key articles are Nikolaus Ritt’s “Meaning in a material world or How to find out what linguists think about meaning” (pp. 235–267) and Aleksander Szwedek’s “An alternative theory of metaphorisation” (pp. 313–327); these are particularly important because they question our current understanding of the relationship between language and meaning. Ritt is of the opinion that linguists are not careful enough in defining meaning, which is bad for the reputation of linguistics as an empirical science, while Szwedek suggests a correction to Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of metaphor (1980). Michal Janowski follows Szwedek in considering “schematization and valuation in abstract

concepts,” and provides an empirical corpus-based description of how abstract nouns are objectified in the English language (pp. 139–156).

Some of the most carefully written articles in this volume do not focus on questioning current practices, but on reporting research findings per se. In particular, I would like to mention Anna Cieślicka’s “Effects of literal plausibility and predictability on the suppression of irrelevant literal meanings in idiom processing” (pp. 39–61), Anna Dziemianko’s “The analytical definition in monolingual English learners’ dictionaries as a vehicle for syntactic information on verbs: A diachronic perspective” (pp. 63–89), Iwona Knaś’s “English *at*: Investigating its conceptualization by native speakers and Polish advanced learners of English” (pp. 157–186), and Jūratė Ruzaitė’s “Setting boundaries to fuzzy adjectives: A corpus approach” (pp. 269–291). Adam Głaz’s article on vantage theory is also informed and well-written, and serves the purpose of introducing another way of approaching language and meaning (pp. 91–112).

The editor, herself a linguist and semanticist, did not contribute a research article, but she did write the introduction, entitled “Language, meaning and scientific endeavour” (pp. 7–13), in which she stresses the “interdisciplinary character of the book” and the “complex relations between language and meaning” (p. 12). The main strength of the book seems indeed to lie in the variety of approaches which it serves to the reader in a single package. With but little imagination, one can hear the articles interact and negotiate the characteristics of linguistic meaning and meaning in general. To give an example, on page 235, Ritt asks “what sort of thing meaning is ... if it is a ‘thing’ ... Is it or is it not part of the physical universe?”, and on pages 317–319 Szwedek quotes an answer by Thomas Aquinas, who suggested that God talks to us through material objects because that is a language we as humans can understand, and translates another answer by a Polish philosopher, Kotarbiński, who wished to “adopt a stance in which all categories are reduced to the category of things”.

The volume is also admirably up to date, considering the short time span between the original meeting and the publication. This can be compared to such texts as *Body, Language, and Mind*, the second volume of which Bernárdez refers to as having been published in 2006 (Frank, Dirven, Ziemke and Bernárdez In press); the first volume only appeared when I was writing this review (Ziemke, Zlatev and Frank 2007). The apparent speed of the editing work is also the most apparent weakness of Fabiszak’s book. It is clear that many of the articles would have profited

from corrections, more feedback, and rewriting, and sometimes the ideas are either not developed to their full potential or, in fewer cases, obscured by bad academic English.

With regard to this volume, ‘up to date’ should be understood in the sense of reflecting what occupies people right now and helping to predict which direction they are going in. As regards the field that is most familiar to me, cognitive linguistics, people appear to be attracted by the possibility of moving on from Lakoff and Johnson’s original ideas (e.g. 1980) towards what Bernárdez calls “situatedness of cognition” (pp. 25–26). The book may thus function as a valuable indicator of what is happening on the cognitive linguistic scene. However, it does not provide any detailed, explicit discussion of such matters as the development of cognitive linguistic theory. The reader has to trawl through the articles and references to arrive at a fuller picture. To give a couple of examples, Bernárdez does not mention Zlatev’s notion of “situated embodiment” (1997: 6–7), but Lema Quintana and Guerra de la Torre do (p. 211, 216); while Szwedek does not include discussion of Lakoff and Johnson’s later work in his references to their conceptual metaphor theory (1999), although Bernárdez takes it into account (p. 22, 35). As regards Szwedek’s article, I would also have liked to see a fuller discussion of the development of his own “objectification” theory in order to understand to what extent this article added to the previous ones which he listed in his references.

To conclude, I would have liked to edit this book myself; its topic and wide range of authors must have made it an exciting task. However, I would give it to researchers rather than students (although the editor suggests both as potential target groups, p. 12), except in the case of advanced students who were already familiar with semantic studies and able to compare people’s work and see it in a wider context. I also think that an even more exciting book could have been produced by omitting some of the poorest contributions and adding a couple of invited ones. The book is nevertheless yet another proof of the strength of linguistic work in Poland¹, and certainly worth a browse for any linguist interested in the current state of research into language and meaning.

¹ In case the reader wishes for some other proof, s/he may consider that the 10th International Cognitive Linguistic Conference was successfully held in Kraków this year (2007), or Magnusson, Kardela and Głaz (2007).

References

- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Magnusson, Ulf, Kardela, Henryk and Głaz, Adam (eds.) (2007) *Further Insights into Semantics and Lexicography*. Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press.
- Ziemke, Tom, Zlatev, Jordan and Frank, Roslyn M. (eds.) (2007) *Body, Language and Mind. Vol. 1: Embodiment*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Zlatev, Jordan (1997) *Situated Embodiment: Studies in the Emergence of Spatial Meaning*. Stockholm: Gotab.
- Frank, Roslyn M., Dirven, René, Ziemke, Tom and Bernárdez, Enrique (eds.) In press. *Body, Language and Mind. Vol. 2. Sociocultural Situatedness*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Contact information:

Heli Tissari
Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change in English
P.O. Box 24 (Unioninkatu 40 B)
FI-00014 University of Helsinki
Finland
e-mail: heli(dot)tissari(at)helsinki(dot)fi