The avowed aim of this first volume in the *Current Research in the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface* series is, according to its editor, “to begin to take some steps to reducing the heat of […] discussions [relating to how linguistically-conveyed meaning should be defined, and therefore studied; M.T.] and to begin to increase the light that might profitably be shed on some of the problems of interdigitating content and context” (p. 14). It is in the light of this pronouncement that the current review will assess the contribution made by the 15 articles of this volume to the ongoing debate regarding the boundary between semantics and pragmatics, and whether there should be any such.

In the ‘Introduction’, Ken Turner prepares the ground for the volume, if not the entire series, by tracing the development from semantics to pragmatics (and back again). Carnap’s distinction between “pure” and “descriptive” studies, Montague’s model theoretic semantics, Gricean pragmatics, and finally current dynamic semantic approaches serve as intellectual milestones in this broad classification of modern approaches to linguistic meaning. The boundaries of the canvas are thus set out, while the details remain to be filled in. This is no small feat, given the introduction’s intended brevity (implicit in the subtitle “seven-inch version”), and it is accomplished in an informative, critical, and entertaining fashion.

In Chapter 1, ‘Discourse structure and the logic of conversation’, Nicholas Asher picks up the discussion where the introduction left it, arguing for a way of potentially reconciling (Gricean) pragmatics and (dynamic) semantics. Discourse structure is the key to this, as it can provide evidence for modelling (agents’/systems’) cognitive states, and vice versa, allowing us to re-cast Gricean maxims in Segmented Discourse Representation Theory (SDRT) terms.\(^1\) Meaning construction is incremental, drawing on clues provided by different levels of interpretation: logical forms of sentences, discourse structure analysable in SDRT terms, and agents’ cognitive states. While one may question the fact that one cannot know another’s intention

\(^1\) Previous attempts along these lines (Kasher, 1976; Cohen and Levesque, 1990; Thomason, 1990) lacked either the formal tools (provided here by SDRT), or the spelling out of how the various levels of interpretation (sentences, discourse structure, beliefs/intentions) interrelate, or both.
as adequate motivation for the proposed approach, arguing instead that Gricean R(eflexive)-intentions do not amount to the sort of mind-guessing which has often led to their dismissal as “irrelevant to the content of what’s said” (ibid.), it is nevertheless true that the ‘mechanics’ of intention recognition have been largely understudied. In this sense, this chapter is a welcome and original contribution, more so as it acknowledges that intention recognition/ attribution does not happen in vacuo, but against a presumption of rationality which, combined with world knowledge, participates in agents’ reasoning by motivating default paths of action.

Chapter 2, ‘On the semantic and pragmatic polyfunctionality of modal verbs’ by Johan van de Auwera, is a contrastive study of modal verbs (mainly) in English and Dutch. Van de Auwera proposes two typologies, one of semantic and one of pragmatic polyfunctionality, which aim to bring some order to our understanding of the terms vagueness, ambiguity, polysemy, and homonymy. This is done by incorporating diachronic insights, yet including the speaker-specific dimension alongside the language-specific one by introducing the notion of conventionalisation (p. 53). This notion, now central to the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, unfortunately remains further undefined: is conventionalisation a matter of frequency of use, or does the term stand for a cognitive shortcut, however this comes about, or, finally, are the usage and cognitive dimensions interrelated? Such theoretical concerns remain beyond the scope of this chapter, which, one feels, aims to tackle the meaning of modal verbs by appealing to the semantics/pragmatics distinction rather than vice versa. This, it does convincingly and concisely, while the typologies put forward represent concrete proposals which can be tested cross-linguistically.

Drawing the semantics/pragmatics distinction is the focus of Chapter 3, ‘The semantics/pragmatics distinction: what it is and why it matters’ by Kent Bach. After reviewing several dichotomies which have served (and, it is argued, when taken individually, failed) as grounds to draw this distinction in the past, Bach proposes to disassociate this from truth conditions, making it instead a matter of what is or is not linguistically encoded: “semantic information pertains to linguistic expressions, whereas pragmatic information pertains to utterances and facts surrounding them” (p. 74). This formulation of the semantics/pragmatics distinction is methodologically supported by a distinction between narrow and broad context (p. 72), and theoretically justified by defending three interrelated notions: that of the autonomy of semantics (as narrow linguistic competence, not in its truth-conditional guise) from pragmatics, that of literal meaning (as close to the Gricean notion of ‘what is said’), and that of Gricean intentions (contra Relevance Theory (hence RT). In re-iterating the author’s known views, this chapter manages to do so concisely, while deliberately remaining non-committal (at least, to an extent) and retaining a broad sweep, with some of the more recent literature critically hinted at, if not fully engaged with.

In a happy coincidence (since chapters are ordered alphabetically), Bach’s closing anti-RT section (pp. 79–80) is followed by Chapter 4, ‘The semantics/pragmatics distinction’ by Jay O’Hara. O’Hara argues for a distinction between semantic and pragmatic meaning, the former being objective and the latter subjective. This distinction is motivated by the observation that many expressions, such as ‘it is raining’, have different meanings in different contexts. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the implications of this distinction for the study of language and discourse.
 distinction: a view from Relevance Theory’, where Robyn Carston engages with the issues raised in the previous chapter (in particular Bach’s defence of a literal notion of ‘what is said’; pp. 108–109), and much else besides. In a clearly written article (as we have come to expect of her), the author methodically spells out those points which are claimed to differentiate previous approaches to meaning (i.e. various semantics/pragmatics couplings) from RT, at the intellectual roots of which lies the quest for psychological plausibility. This is what drives the distinction of linguistic semantics (a matter of underdetermined logical forms) from truth-conditional semantics (a matter of the proposition expressed, now deemed an explicature), and of both from pragmatics (a matter of implicatures). The methodological apparatus of RT is thus introduced via a series of distinctions, such as decoding vs. inference, explicature vs. implicature, procedural vs. conceptual encoding, adding up to a concise and clear presentation of the main notions developed within the RT framework.

In Chapter 5, ‘English indefinite noun phrases and plurality’, Brendan Gillon attempts to account for the meaning of the indefinite NP in sentences such as

(1) Isabelle gave the children a cookie

where ‘a cookie’ may denote a single cookie or several cookies. Based on syntactic and semantic evidence, he proposes the following common structure as applicable to all English common NPs

\[
\text{DET[erminer]} \quad \text{A[jective] cardinal} \quad \text{A[jective] predicative} \quad \text{A[jective] thematic N[oun]}
\]

which, alongside the observation that the indefinite NP may, or may not, be assigned clausal scope, helps account for the two possible readings of (1). The chapter leans on the (model-theoretic) semantic side, focussing on the compositional semantics of constituent phrases, while pragmatic notions such as ‘implicature’ are only marginally brought in.

In Chapter 6, ‘Towards a model of situated discourse analysis’, Yueguo Gu takes on the ambitious task of beginning to explicate “the actual use of language by actual people doing actual things with language in actual social situations” (p. 150). Gu’s proposal builds on, yet differentiates itself from, functional (in particular, Hallidayan) approaches. It is argued that discourse must be studied at the micro-level, and in its full complexity, which is viewed here as the result of the interplay between three factors, participants’ goals, discourse-structural, and interpersonal considerations. These three factors also define the levels at which analysis must be carried out. Such insistence on studying discourse in its full complexity, however, engenders the danger that, in the analysis of actual examples, everyday terms are used self-explanatorily. By using as its meta-language the very terms it is meant to explain, the proposed theoretical apparatus appears to have descriptive, rather than explanatory, power. The chapter’s main contribution lies, as a result, in foregrounding, while not necessarily resolving, the issues.

In Chapter 7, ‘Semantics vs. pragmatics: ANY in Game-Theoretical Semantics’, Michael Hand uses the apparatus of Game Theoretic Semantics (GTS) to give a
unified account of the meaning of the determiner *any*. Previous approaches have variably seen this as an instantiation of the universal (∀-any) or existential (∃-any) quantifiers, or as ambiguous between the two. GTS claims that *any* is unambiguous because it always refers the choice to the same “player” in semantical games (i.e. this is its stable ‘semantic’ content), without this meaning that it must always assume the character of either ∀ or ∃. This elegant analysis serves to introduce the main notions of GTS, wherein meaning is more usefully viewed as a series of moves in a game, rather than paraphrasable by means of a single propositional formula (or multiple such formulae, in cases of ambiguity). Logical properties of contexts create meaning ‘affordances’ for expressions, and “roles” to be allocated to “players”. Crucially, such roles can be switched. Meaning is thus dynamically generated by the interaction of “players”, “roles”, and “contexts”, all of which, though semantic notions (in the sense of being abstracted from nonce contexts), nevertheless integrate pragmatic considerations.

In Chapter 8, ‘Default semantics, pragmatics, and intentions’, Katarzyna Jaszczolt makes a case for a default semantics, and illustrates its applicability to various phenomena of natural languages, which have previously warranted an appeal to either semantic ambiguity, or semantic underspecification, such as definite descriptions, negation, sentential connectives, and numerals. Building on Husserl’s phenomenology, this account acknowledges different types and degrees of strength of intentions, including default ones. At least some intentions (default ones) can be taken for granted, and trigger the default semantics for an utterance, yielding a fully specified semantic representation, while it is departures from the default which must be signalled contextually. It is interesting that, prioritising psychological plausibility, much as RT theorists do, leads Jaszczolt to argue, contra RT, not for underspecified semantic representations, but for default ones, arising from the intrusion of intentions into semantics. The semantic representation into which intentions intrude is construed as a Discourse Representation Structure, and the proposed account seen as complementary to Kamp and Reyle’s (1993) Discourse Representation Theory.

Chapter 9, “On the semantics and pragmatics of ‘identifier so’” by Andrew Kehler and Gregory Ward, presents a new analysis of identifier *so*, that is, an adverbial *so* placed pre- or post-verbally and functioning as an anaphor to an event. In a clear exposition, which prioritises the informational structure of the discourse, but also takes in the syntactic and semantic properties of the adverbial and of the verbs involved, the authors propose a series of diagnostic tests for the different functions/interpretations of identifier *so* in context. Syntactic, semantic (i.e. drawing on a model of the discourse functioning as a semantic store) and pragmatic (i.e. salient in context, inferable) information are drawn in parallel, in an effort to yield an incremental, psychologically plausible account of utterance interpretation. The chapter represents a good example of how due attention to the interplay of these factors can explain away idiosyncracies previously left unexplained, while convincingly accounting for remaining ones with the help of historical data. One might only wish that the “corpus of naturally occurring data” (p. 254) on which the analysis is based (presumably, this is not limited to the sources listed on p. 256?) were actually described, rather than merely mentioned.

In Chapter 10, ‘At least some determiners aren’t determiners’, Manfred Krifka proposes a compositional analysis of “at least”, “at most”, and “in between” quan-
tifiers, traditionally (e.g. in Generalised Quantifier Theory) explained alongside other quantifiers as determiners. Drawing attention on those aspects which differentiate such quantifiers from determiners, Krifka proposes that they function to introduce alternatives, which sometimes survive (“at least”), while other times they are deleted (“at most”). This process of alternative-introduction where no entailment relationship holds between the alternatives, already noticed by Hirschberg (1985), has led to arguing either for a contextualisation of the scope of generalised implicatures (Hirschberg, 1985: 43), or, within the framework of RT, for their abolition (Carston, 1995). Krifka does not engage with this debate, nor does he further elucidate the claim that “what counts as more or less informative might depend on the context” (p. 271). Such opportunities to problematise the semantics/pragmatics distinction remain unexplored, leaving one with the feeling that the traditional way of drawing the distinction can be upheld if only effort is devoted to bringing order to what ‘falls’ on either side of it.

Chapter 11, ‘On an illocutionary connective datte’, provides an interesting counterpoint to the predominantly (post-)Gricean focus of the rest of the volume, by exemplifying current work on another major area of pragmatic interest, that of Speech Act Theory. Adopting Vanderveken’s illocutionary logic, Susumu Kubo unfolds a unified analysis of occurrences of the Japanese connective datte in dialogue. The proposed analysis combines propositional and illocutionary elements, yet psychological aspects of interpretation are not touched upon, which is likely to disappoint those for whom psychological plausibility is a guiding principle of analysis. Also, it would have been helpful if some context were provided for the examples discussed, which are drawn from novels.

In Chapter 12, ‘Contrastive topic: a locus of interface evidence from Korean and English’, Chungmin Lee draws attention to the phenomenon of contrastive topic (CT), where assertion of a term within the Topic Phrase excludes implicitly introduced alternatives which stand in contrast to this term. This is marked phonologically (intonationally) in English and phonologically as well as morphologically (via a CT particle) in Korean. Several examples from both languages serve to illustrate the phenomenon in its many guises and to distinguish it from neighbouring phenomena (e.g. focus). The main contribution of the chapter thus consists, as its author concedes (p. 340), in circumscribing an area for future research, to which notions such as presupposition, scalar implicature, and metalinguistic negation, mentioned here in passing, could be fruitfully applied.

In Chapter 13, ‘The pragmatics of signs, the semantics of relevance, and the semantics/pragmatics interface’, François Nemo presents an overview-cum-application of a post-Ducrotian program which emphasises the instructional/interactional import of expressions claimed to operate on all levels of analysis, from the morphological one upwards, and not only at the level of utterances (as in RT). Semantic meaning is now equated not with the designational potential of expressions, but rather with their potential to distinguish extra-linguistic realities from each other, which crucially brings cognising agents (who do the distinguishing) back into the definition of semantics, from where Morris’s definition had expelled them. On the other hand, pragmatics integrates “sociological, interpersonal, interlocutive, and cognitive constraints” (p. 368), only some of which (such as the scalar constraint on
relevance) are subsequently discussed. A wealth of examples are adduced to illustrate these points (though, on occasion, one well-chosen example could have sufficed). Yet, in view of the breadth and length of the discussion, a final synthesis of the several lines developed into a concise and structured argument is strongly missed.

The task of revising the Morris/Carnap picture of the distinction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics is taken up by Jaroslav Peregrin in Chapter 14, ‘The pragmatisation of semantics’. Listing a number of phenomena known to defy a (full) characterisation of their content independently of context (indefinites, pronouns, articles, topic/focus; yet a now widely acknowledged account of the semantics of some of these expressions may be found in Kaplan’s (1977) Logic of Demonstratives), Peregrin argues against logical atomism, embracing instead linguistic holism: “[l]anguage is a co-operative enterprise, and its working cannot be construed as a resultant of self-standing workings of mutually independent items” (p. 431).

Acknowledging the intellectual roots of this argument in the works of Davidson, and Sellars, via Brandom, Peregrin goes on to propose renewed definitions for each of the constituents of the familiar tripartite distinction: “we suggest to consider syntax as the theory of which expressions people use to communicate (i.e. a theory of well-formedness), while semantics as the theory of how they use them” (p. 435). The boundary between semantics and pragmatics is now drawn with reference to the notion of invariance: semantics deals with meaning as ‘the ‘most substantial part’ of the way the expression is being put to use’” (p. 437), while pragmatics, “essentially a matter of norms […] of rules which institute what is right and what is wrong within the realm of usage of language” (p. 433), deals with “ways of putting expressions to use” (p. 436).

The final article in this collection, ‘Does it make any sense? Updating = consistency checking’, adds yet another point of view, that of computational linguistics, to the ongoing debate. In this, Allan Ramsay proposes to view understanding an utterance as a two-step process. Initially, a weak (i.e. underspecified) semantic representation is constructed for an utterance U uttered in context. Combined with propositions already held by the hearer (i.e. his/her belief set, which, when communication proceeds smoothly, will approximate that of the speaker) this representation yields a number of consequences, in the form of entailments, which can be checked for consistency against the said belief set. If they are consistent with it, the representation of the utterance, now formalised as a model, is added to the belief set of the hearer, which is thereby updated accordingly. This proposal is worked out for a number of phenomena, including referring expressions, presupposition, (lexical) underspecification, and the semantics of tense, and, while it is clear that effort has been taken to keep technicalities to a minimum, providing a definition of technical terms used (e.g. Skolem constants) would have been useful, as such knowledge cannot be taken for granted in an article addressed to a broad audience spanning several disciplines.

In conclusion, the volume stands up to its avowed aim, providing an up-to-date picture of work carried out on both sides of the semantics/pragmatics interface, as well as on the interface itself. Common threads are hard to find in such a broad-ranging collection of articles, though the dynamism of current semantic theories, and hearer-orientation characteristic of the field in recent years do come through. Effort has clearly been taken to balance contributions between studies of particular
phenomena (7) and more theoretically-oriented ones (8), and also across a range of theoretical frameworks (Segmented Discourse Representation Theory, Relevance Theory, Default Semantics, Game-Theoretic Semantics, to mention only a few), phenomena studied (a non-exhaustive list includes modality, indefinite NPs, referring expressions, illocutionary acts, contrastive topic), and even geographical areas³ (5 contributions each from the UK and the US respectively, and 3 each from Continental Europe and Asia)! One might only wish that a more interventionist attitude had been adopted with respect to editing, with spelling, apostrophe usage, and style constituting something of a predicament for some contributions more than others. This, nevertheless, does not subtract from the intellectual value of a volume which deserves to be on any (in the universal sense) semanticist’s/pragmaticist’s shelf.

References


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³ Even in this ‘globalised’ day and age, the intellectual traditions represented in this volume can be traced back to geographically locatable schools of thought, which is also the reason why the UK is listed here separately from Continental Europe.