

SEMANTIC FIELDS
A LINGUISTIC-PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY IN MEANING RELATIONS

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This study in cognitive science brings together traditional philosophical questions about meaning and meaning relationships with recent findings in cognitive psychology, neurology, ethno-linguistics, and new methods of semantic research.

Part I is a query into the nature of meaning as projected in the notion of conceptual And semantic fields. Words related in meaning are organized in a semantic field. Theoretical as well as methodological questions about semantic fields are dealt with in the light of new findings about conceptual networks, memory structure, retrieval mechanisms, and the modularity of language as revealed by differences of age, status, sex, culture etc. It is suggested that a firm basis exists for further research in relations in various semantic fields, viewing these fields as the actual realization of cognitive networks.

Part II details the obstacles as well the benefits gained in conducting research on a semantic field of a difficult philosophical concept such as 'similarity'. Verbs, nouns, adjectives, prepositions and idiomatic expressions of similarity and related notions mainly in Hebrew are examined through their semantic relations and their respective roles in the semantic field. Two main conclusions result from this investigation:

- a) "similarity" is a bundle of relations rather than a unitary concept. It gathers under one roof subtypes of similarity such as: analogy and comparison, parallelism, duplication, part-whole relations, copy, forgery, and mistaken identification. Each subtype has its own logical characteristics.
- b) The mechanism that gathers these subtypes of similarity under one concept, 'similarity' is based on a quasi-contradiction or tension between unity and plurality, between precision ('the very image') and loose ends ('images')
These two characteristics of 'similarity' account for its aptness to perform its cognitive function as an adjuster, a liaison between newly acquired, unlabeled information and a whole body of structures knowledge.

Part III sets forth further applications of the semantic field method. Alternations of closely related words and expressions in the field shed new light on the choice of words and the issue of selectional restriction in meaning. Alternation of related

discourse metaphors points out their nature as rule-governed devices. Several rules of meaning render such metaphors understandable and meaningful. This study is an initial step toward a theory of the logical-semantic basis of metaphor. The complete book shows what is gained by combining traditional philosophical and linguistic questions with modern research method and their findings.

Table of contents

Part I Theory

1. What are semantic fields
2. Meaning relation
- 3.

Part II A Semantic field at work

4. The semantic field of the concept of 'similarity'
5. Idioms of 'similarity'
6. Prepositions
7. Conclusions

Part III Further applications

8. Metaphors and alternations
9. Metaphors and semantic fields

Conclusions: Semantic fields as conceptual networks

Index

References