

**INVESTIGATION IN CONCEPTUAL SEMANTICS -  
SEMANTIC FIELDS AND THE ANATOMY OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS**

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The purpose of this book is to present the theory and practice of semantic fields. As powerful tools in the study of the nature of abstract concepts such as 'properties', 'change', 'difference', 'value', and others. Since Jost Trier first coined the term semantic fields in the early thirties, it was commonly used to meaning relations in well structured areas of meaning such as kinship relations, color and cooking terms, vessels and containers, etc. In my previous book: *Semantic Fields* (1994) I explained how psycholinguistics, language acquisition, neuron-linguistics, ethnology, and other disciplines provide a sound theoretical basis, for using the semantic field technique as a linguistic tool for understanding meaning relations and structures. I also explained in my book how an unsolved irritating philosophical-logical issue as the nature of the relation of 'similarity' finds a thorough description and clarification via comparative study of the English and Hebrew parallel semantic fields of 'similarity'.

The present work carries the study of abstract concepts one step further. It exemplifies and analyses meaning inter and intra- relations of six more semantic fields of abstract notions. Each presentation and analysis of the relations among lexical items in the field is accompanied by a study of a related theoretical question about the nature of these relations.

The introductory chapter surveys crucial developments in the recent history of semantics emphasizing the inclination towards the study of the mental lexicon as undertaken mainly by cognitive linguists. So called obstacles toward proper semantic descriptions such as polysemy, metaphor, frozen collocations, idioms, etc., are integrated in the study and are treated as rich sources of information for understanding further relations in a semantic field and between neighboring and even distant fields as in the case of polysemy and metaphor respectively.

Chapter 1 studies the semantic field of 'properties' and 'characteristics' while dealing with the philosophical problem of sense vs. reference, a crucial problem related to the unique problematic status of abstract concepts.

Chapter 2 deals with the issue of meaning components and features through the analysis of the semantic field of 'difference'. It questions the existence of basic components and of super-fields. The issue of the stratification of meaning is the main subject accompanying the study of the semantic field of negativity in chapter 3. The meanings of the subgroups in this field are shown to be layered from the physical and mental through the social to the cultural. The main discovery of this study is the existence of a pre-psychological layer which controls logical and mathematical thinking along the same lines as the other layers with the same bias towards the positive. The nature of this bias is examined in the chapter.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 cope with the nature of thresholds, parts, and change and with the function of dynamic operators in conceptual networks. They deal with the theoretical issue of individuation of contents, the importance of the mass-count dichotomy, and the bias towards the positive mentioned above which affects these fields as well.

The seventh chapter probes into the nature of evaluation through etymologies and through the relations of the lexical items in the semantic field of 'value' and their interrelations. Here again, as in the other chapters, the function of visual models is shown to be of a great importance in constructing abstract notions from immediate human sensual experience. Grasping the intra-relations between the six fields of six abstract concepts enables one to understand some traits of the structure and function of abstraction and how it is rooted in human experience and in human needs.

The concluding chapter summarizes the role of three main dimensions which emerge from all the studies as basic building blocks of the conceptual system: the space-time dimension, the logical dimension where identity, negation, inclusion, and other logical notions operate, and the last dimension: that of evaluating and assigning the 'plus' and 'minus' values of preferring and of rejecting in and explicit as well as in an implicit manner. Taken together these issues prove how effective the study of semantic fields of abstract concept is for a better understanding of the anatomy of abstraction and of the nature of the mental lexicon.

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