

Book reviews

Andreas Blank: *Prinzipien des lexikalischen Bedeutungswandels am Beispiel der romanischen Sprachen* [Principles of lexical semantic change as manifest in Romance languages]. (Beiheft der Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, volume 285.) Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997, 533 pp., ISBN 3-484-522-85-2

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This great opus by the late Andreas Blank is a masterpiece thanks to both the depth of its theoretical foundations and its host of concrete examples. These are also listed separately in the word index (*Wortregister*, pp. 479–496), amounting to about 1500 single items in more than ten different languages. Given its unique character as a rich quarry, it is regrettable that the book only exists in German and is not (yet) available in English. Producing an English translation would indeed be a real, tangible homage to the great talents of this marvellous scholar who died far too young.

In this review I will mainly concentrate on Blank's theoretical foundations. Coming from a semantic-structuralist background, Blank has managed – unlike other Romance historical linguists such as Coseriu (see Coseriu 2000) – to adopt an open attitude towards the new theoretical prospects opened up by cognitive linguistics, towards which he was gradually developing, as appears from his edited volume (Blank and Koch 1999).

In *Prinzipien*, he is still wavering between some basic tenets of Saussurean structuralism and the full consequences of the cognitive paradigm change. This is manifested most clearly in his belief in a fundamental split between linguistic meaning and encyclopedic information. Whereas cognitive linguists such as Geeraerts (1988) and many other

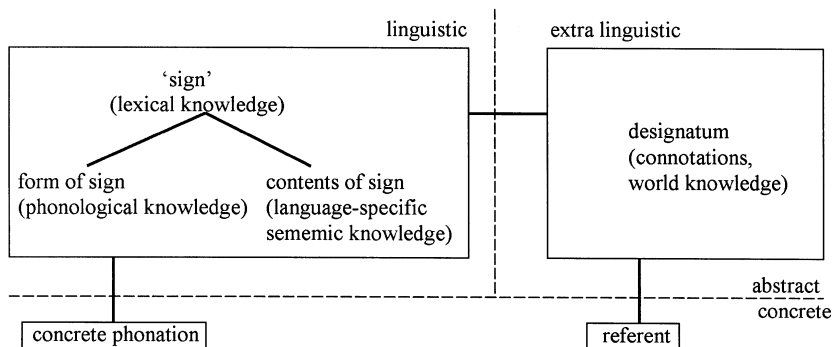


Figure 1.

lexicologists maintain that it is impossible to establish any clear borderline here, Blank still defends the absolute validity of this principle (pp. 47–102), summarised in his table on p. 102, translated here into English in Figure 1.

While in cognitive linguistics the far more sophisticated view prevails (especially see Taylor, to appear) that while we can make a distinction between what is prototypically linguistic meaning and what is prototypically encyclopedic information, it is also maintained that there are no criteria available for establishing any clear borderline between the two. Blank still sticks to the traditional structuralist view, first laid down by Saussure, that meaning is an autonomous system, only indirectly related to the conceptual system. But since encyclopedic knowledge is an essential component of the conceptual system, the basic theorem of structuralism is no longer tenable. If encyclopedic knowledge is intimately intertwined with linguistic expressions, how is it possible to banish the conceptual system from the linguistic system?

Blank's opening towards the cognitive linguistic position of an integrated linguistic and conceptual system may, perhaps implicitly, be suggested by the use of broken lines in Figure 1. It comes to the fore explicitly through Blank's attributing an important role to world knowledge (the preferred structuralist term) or encyclopedic knowledge in the various processes of semantic change. Elements from this encyclopedic knowledge become incorporated into the linguistic (or sememic) meaning of a word, first in the speech of some individual speaker, then into that of her/his surroundings, and eventually, if the semantic change becomes general, into that of the whole language community. This process is a massive one, and its ubiquitous operation in virtually all lexical items is another indication that encyclopedic meanings are part and parcel of our

daily use of the lexicon and are bound to trigger off massive historical changes in the lexicon over decades and centuries. In a separatist view of absolute borderlines between the linguistic and the nonlinguistic, the intrusion of the latter into the former constitutes no minor challenge.

The great achievement of this work by Blank is to have produced a successor to the monument that Stephen Ullman (1957, 1964) left. Blank's evaluation of Ullman was that he did excellent semantic work, but lacked a theory (apart from some vague structuralism). But he managed to see the basic principles of semantic change, though not relating them to the needs of the human mind and of communication. Here Blank comes up with two great innovations: he refines the principles of semantic change considerably, linking them to humans' encyclopedic knowledge and thus to the real context in which language lives and is used by its speakers.

The strange gap in the book is that it nowhere (at least as far as I can see, see below) invokes Grice's (1975) notions of conversational and conventional implicatures to account for lexical change, which is common practice in the literature of historical linguistics now (see Traugott 1988). But I may be wrong here, since Grice and the relevant paper are mentioned in the Reference section. In fact, there is no way of checking this absence of the principle of conventional implicature without re-reading the whole book. Indeed, it is most astonishing that the book does not contain a subject index, where a term such as *conversational implicature* could be checked. Thus one of the easiest and most practical instruments for finding and checking the elements of the book's theoretical framework is not available. This may suggest that the author attached somewhat less importance to the theoretical foundations of his magnum opus than to the concrete instances to be accounted for by the framework. Or was it just *un accident de parcours*?

However that may be, this monumental study proves to be one of the richest treasure troves in historical linguistics. What a pity that so many other quarries had to be left unmined by the highly talented scholar who left the scene of today's linguistics so regrettably early.

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Sophia S. A. Marmaridou: *Pragmatic Meaning and Cognition*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000, 322 pp., ISBN 90-272-5095-2 (Eur.)

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The purpose of the book is to reconcile two mutually exclusive traditions in the study of linguistic pragmatics, the cognitive and the societal. Marmaridou attempts to resolve the diverse aims of these approaches by invoking the perspective and methodology of cognitive linguistics. In so doing, she presents a reanalysis of four classic pragmatic topics: deixis, presupposition, speech acts, and implicature, arguing that these phenomena can be shown to be motivated by cognitive structures and mechanisms, ultimately grounded in socio-physical experience. Hence, the book provides a detailed overview of experiential realism, and an introduction to many of the basic tenets of cognitive linguistics such as conceptual metaphor, mental spaces, idealized cognitive models (ICMs), semantic frames, prototypes, prototype effects, and image schemas, in relation to the study of pragmatics. A consequence of her analysis is that – in keeping with the widespread assumption in cognitive linguistics – a new definition of pragmatics is offered, which treats pragmatic meaning as situationally grounded linguistic meaning, properly handled within cognitive semantics, and not a distinct level of processing vis-à-vis propositional meaning.

The premise for Marmaridou's thesis is that there are two mutually exclusive traditions in contemporary pragmatics, ultimately derived from the Anglo-American philosophy of language tradition. These are what she

identifies as the cognitive and the societal approaches. The cognitive tradition, influenced in particular by the Chomskyan distinction between performance and competence, is concerned, she maintains, with treating pragmatic knowledge as a computational ability which serves to “patch up” truth-conditional semantic knowledge. This requires treating pragmatic knowledge as a highly idealized ability, such that interlocutors become “pragmatic abstractions, in the same way that the sentence is a grammatical abstraction in syntactic theory” (pp. 32). Marmaridou portrays the societal tradition, associated with scholars such as Duranti (1986) and Mey (1987), as a reaction to the idealizing tendency of the cognitive tradition. This approach views meaning as being primarily a social and situational construct, and hence pragmatics as the study of the social interactions and culture-specific institutions which structure language use. Accordingly, cognitive factors are excluded from study.

Marmaridou argues that both cognitive and social factors are important for an adequate understanding of language use. Approaches which fail to take seriously either dimension will be unable to provide an adequate account of pragmatic knowledge, or the way in which meaning is derived during ongoing communication. She suggests that experiential realism, the philosophy associated with cognitive semantics, provides a way of understanding the symbiosis between cognition and socio-physical experience. This view posits that meaning, as reflected in cognitive structures and mechanisms, is grounded in socio-physical experience. Hence, there are no absolute foundations of meaning, in an objectivist sense, but rather meaning is contingent upon the nature of “embodied” experience. Moreover, as language reflects cognitive structure, which itself constitutes an internalization of socio-physical experience, it follows that language (and the way it is used) is both a social institution and motivated by cognitive structure. As such, Marmaridou proposes it is possible to provide an alternative view on the study of pragmatics, without excluding two important factors which bear on language use.

In order to illustrate her thesis, Marmaridou provides extensive reanalyses of four areas traditionally associated with pragmatics, namely deixis, presupposition, speech acts, and implicature. As she makes clear, her choice does not bestow primacy on these topics over other areas of pragmatic research, for instance discourse markers (e.g., Schiffrin 1987). Rather, as she seeks to reconcile the two distinct tendencies described above, and in so doing to provide a new view of pragmatics, she takes topics which have constituted the mainstay of pragmatic investigation inspired by the dominant Anglo-American philosophical tradition. Her approach is to provide an overview of the classic treatments of each, present problems which cannot be handled by the classic treatments, and

propose solutions using theoretical tools drawn from cognitive semantics, such as ICMs, mental spaces, conceptual metaphors, and prototype theory. She proceeds by identifying specific cognitive structures and mechanisms which motivate each pragmatic phenomenon, and moreover, illustrates how the cognitive structure is grounded in socio-physical experience. The solutions she proposes, she claims, provide ways of adequately accounting for the data, in ways which satisfy the different impulses and concerns of scholars associated with the cognitive and societal traditions.

Marmaridou's first illustration relates to deixis. Based on a detailed survey of linguistic examples, she suggests that the traditional deictic categories of social and person deixis relate to the same phenomenon, while place, time, and discourse deixis are also related. She claims that this overlapping behavior results from each category of deixis being structured by a single ICM, which concerns physical pointing, and is responsible for the prototypical structure of the deixis category. The overlapping behavior in person and social deixis on the one hand, and place, time, and discourse deixis on the other are associated by metaphoric mappings. The most interesting aspect of the analysis, however, is the view that deixis exhibits prototype effects, with some instances of deixis being less prototypical than others.

In terms of her analysis of presupposition, Marmaridou attempts to account for the nature of presuppositions, and motivate the projection problem – the observation that in complex sentences presuppositions from one part of the sentence may be cancelled or inherited by another part. She proposes that presuppositions correspond to ground in the figure-ground relation (entailments corresponding to figure). Hence, she provides a cognitive structure (experientially grounded) which corresponds to the phenomenon of presupposition. Invoking Fauconnier's (1994 [1985]) mental spaces analysis of presupposition, she argues that whether a presupposition is inherited or not relates to the nature of the background knowledge which holds in different mental spaces. Hence, by viewing discourse construction in terms of the mental space framework, it becomes possible to predict that in certain mental spaces certain kinds of background knowledge are incompatible, and hence the presupposition is blocked.

In order to further demonstrate both the cognitive and social nature of language, Marmaridou examines speech acts. She suggests that speech acts are structured by an ICM of physical force. By virtue of metaphoric mappings, physical force becomes metaphorically associated with social force. Moreover, as with deixis, it is claimed that speech acts exhibit prototype effects. The importance of this analysis for Marmaridou's larger

project is that it strikingly illustrates the internalization of the social power associated with sociocultural institutions in terms of specific cognitive mechanisms. Hence, cognitive structure reflected in language use is experientially grounded.

Her final illustration relates to conversational implicatures, and is perhaps the most fascinating of her case studies. Earlier in the book, Marmaridou argued that the idealization of the cognitive tradition in pragmatics is based on a western view of communication, and thus is highly culture-specific. She suggests that there are a number of weaknesses associated with Gricean pragmatics in particular, not least that it fails to take account of social and cultural purposes. As she observes, Grice posits a cooperative principle which, he contends, informs communication. However, communication is typically not cooperational, as interlocutors attempt to achieve their own purposes within a speech event. She argues that Grice's construal of communication is in fact based on an ICM structured by the conduit metaphor (cf. Reddy 1979). Within such an ICM, cooperation is a prototypical trait. Moreover, this ICM is highly culture-specific. As Grice's views on communication and discourse – adduced from the philosopher's "ivory tower" (in the sense of Kenny 1985) – have been so influential, it is particularly satisfying to see such an outspoken and compelling deconstruction of Grice's position (for related views, see Turner 1991). Moreover, as Marmaridou rejects the traditional view of pragmatics (i.e., the view that speakers' intentions, and hearers' inferences in recovering them, are to be distinguished from the semantic level), there is no reason to posit conversational implicatures as a separate level of processing. Rather, implicatures are treated as contextually grounded linguistic meaning, involving knowledge of interlocutor's goals, negotiated common ground, and general cognitive principles such as cognitive salience, iconicity, and economy, notions which are explicated. Accordingly, Marmaridou emphasizes the interactive and negotiative nature of ongoing meaning construction in communication.

There are two general and important conclusions which emerge from Marmaridou's study. The first relates to the semantics-pragmatics dichotomy. The study of linguistic pragmatics grew out of difficulties faced by theories of meaning which relied on the philosophical notion of truth. Such *verificationist* approaches to meaning assumed that the purpose of language was to describe states of affairs which either hold or do not hold, i.e., are either true or false. However, a number of philosophers observed difficulties with such a view of meaning. For instance, Austin (1962) observed that in a sentence such as *I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth*, the speaker is not in fact describing a state of affairs, but rather doing something, i.e., performing a linguistic act of naming,

which has real-world consequences. As such an utterance is not descriptive, it cannot be said to be true or false, and as such cannot be assigned a truth value. Subsequently, Grice (1975) demonstrated, that the implicatures typically derived from utterances cannot solely be predicted on the basis of the truth values associated with the sentence. Accordingly, pragmatics emerged as a legitimate scientific discipline which sought to “patch-up” a truth-conditional semantics. In adopting experiential realism, not only does Marmaridou reject a semantics-pragmatics dichotomy, the view that pragmatics involves a different “level” of processing to semantic information, she constructs a compelling case for treating semantic and pragmatic meaning as arising simultaneously in ongoing communication.

The second general conclusion which emerges relates to the nature and scope of pragmatics as a topic of investigation. If pragmatics is no longer to be viewed as a layer of interpretation distinct from semantics, a new definition is required. Accordingly, given the views developed in the book, pragmatics constitutes the study of the way in which language structures reality, such that it is meaningful. Put another way, the reality we experience is not an objective mind-independent one, but is structured by virtue of embodied experience (i.e., internalized socio-physical reality, cf. Lakoff [1987] in particular). As language reflects this embodiment, language use can serve to maintain or modify the nature of embodied experience, and in this way, language use can maintain or modify our reality. As she puts it: “[T]he pragmaticist’s task is not only to show whether social reality is reproduced in language use, but also to explain how it is created, perceived and worded so that it is reproduced or changed” (pp. 39–40).

On the whole, this is a fascinating and highly readable book that will be of interest to cognitive linguists and pragmatics scholars. For cognitive linguists it provides one of the first in-depth investigations which brings together a number of pragmatic topics, handled within the framework of cognitive semantics. As such, it illustrates in detail both how such issues might be dealt with from a cognitive linguistics perspective, as well as offering, in a number of cases, quite compelling analyses of problems which have hitherto lacked a ready solution. Secondly, it makes an excellent case for treating pragmatic issues not as distinct or somehow different from semantic issues, but as constituting an indispensable part of our semantic knowledge. For pragmatics scholars, Marmaridou shows how pragmatic phenomena are motivated by specific cognitive structures and mechanisms, and are grounded in socio-physical experience, while emphasizing the role of context for understanding a particular utterance. This is particularly clear in her discussion of presupposition.

Hence, she achieves her aim of reconciling the cognitive and societal traditions.

One weakness associated with the book is that it attempts to appeal to specialists while claiming to also be suitable as a course book in pragmatics. Consequently, Marmaridou is forced to include sufficient background information and redundancy to be able to satisfy the non-specialist. This, on occasion, threatens the thread being developed. Notwithstanding, this book represents a “must read” for all those interested in pragmatics, and the applicability of cognitive linguistics to such topics.

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