Foreword

This book has a long history. A couple of years ago, I suggested to Istvan Kecskes that I write a book relating to my research on negation, tenses and connectives. I spent several years developing what I had in mind, with the support of research projects from the Swiss National Science Foundation. Thanks to the Faculty of Letters, University of Geneva, I finally found the time to think about and expand upon this project over the course of a whole sabbatical semester.

Over the last twenty years, I have pursued two goals: first, to develop a sound description of the semantic issues of tenses, connectives and negation; second, to elaborate a robust theoretical framework able to account for these data.

What struck me in pragmatics was the lack of detailed descriptions supporting theoretical claims. A second puzzle was the disconnect between descriptive works and theoretical tools. For about twenty years, empirical domains like tenses and connectives have been popular topics of investigation in pragmatics; but most of the time, they have been disconnected from the tools developed since the Gricean turn, with concepts like implicature and presupposition frequently unused in the literature. The only new and original theoretical contribution was the conceptual vs. procedural meaning distinction.

This book aims to connect empirical and theoretical issues. The main hypothesis is that the markers under investigation (tenses, connectives and negation) all share a number of different conceptual and procedural meanings contributing to entailment, explicature and implicatures, aspects of meanings which relate to speaker meaning for some of them.

This hypothesis can bear fruit not only at the descriptive but also the theoretical level. If I am right, there should be irrefutable connections between the linguistic system and the types of inference required for verbal communication to succeed. My hope is that this book will help to resolve – if only partially – the entanglement of conceptual and procedural meaning.