Mental Representations. The Interface Between Language and Reality. Edited by Ruth M. Kempson. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1990. 229 pp. ISBN 0 521 34251 1.

Seven authors contributed to this volume dealing with some of the fundamental questions of cognitive linguistics. This is a complex subject and those readers who would not be able to follow some of the papers should read the introductory chapter (pp. 3–25) by the editor of the publication. Ruth M. Kempson's goal is to present a sketch of the state of art with respect to current theories of language and mind. Besides this, she furnishes the readers with background information on the philosophy of language, formal semantics, formal syntax, and pragmatics. Finally, she gives a brief survey of several influential theories (Chomsky, Davidson, Montagu), including the so-called relevance theory.

James Higginbotham is author of the paper titled Contexts, Models, and Meanings: A Note on the Data of Semantics (pp. 29–48). He defines the meaning of expression employed in speech as determined by its form and its situational features. The rules of semantics relate forms to meaning and therefore are context-independent. But the context-independent basis of meaning can only be obtained through careful comparison of context-bound cases.

A variety of partial issues are discussed especially in sections II (On the Direct Interpretation of Natural Languages, pp. 27–82) and III (On the Syntactic Base for Interpretation, pp. 83–130), e.g. the interaction of negation, conjunction and disjunction (in Robin Cooper's paper, pp. 49–61), a type of relational interpretation of noun phrases in a variety of contexts (Elisabet Engdahl, pp. 63–82), bound variable anaphora (Robert May, pp. 85–104), and implicit arguments (Michael Brody and M. Rita Manzini, pp. 105–130).

Section IV of the volume discusses problems of internal representations and natural language use (pp. 131–196).

An extensive paper by Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber discusses utterances and thoughts as representations. They stress that utterances represent both "states of affairs" and thoughts of the speaker and thought or utterance may be said to interpret a certain thought. So far, interpretive representation has not been seriously examined, according to the authors. They maintain that the idea that a thought can be used to represent another thought has not been pursued. This may be true of linguistics but probably not elsewhere, e.g. in philosophy or even in poetry and fiction. The authors' requirement that strict identity should be replaced by mere resemblance is of course acceptable because it is realistic. Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber's suggestions are very useful to the study of metaphor and other tropes. Section IV is concluded by papers on implicature, explicature and truth-theoretic semantics (Robyn Carston, pp. 155–182) and on constraints on relevance (Diane Blakemore, pp. 183–196).

In her concluding paper (on the Grammar-Cognition Interface: The Principle of Full Interpretation, pp. 199–224), Ruth M. Kempson explains the way in which relevance theory can create links whereby apparently disparate views are combined into a unified modular account of language and cognitive processes.

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