

Simplicity of Meaning

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Formal semantics does not like to talk about lexical semantics. In so doing it avoids touching on a question that maybe is of fundamental importance: how come meanings when spelled out in detail are so complicated while abstractly they often seem so simple?

By taking compositionality seriously semantics is now increasingly forced to spell out quite complex algorithms. One of the main reasons is that it likes to think of the cognitive model as a single model. We argue here that this view is counterproductive. Instead we propose to use a system of models interrelated by maps (or codings). The advantage is that the maps can be left implicit in the model, greatly simplifying the explicit content of the models. Meanings can be specified at any of the models and percolate through the system.