

Book notices: *Review of The semantics of English negative prefixes*

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The semantics of English negative prefixes. By Zeki Hamawand. London: Equinox, 2009. Pp. xii, 179. ISBN 9781845539719. \$35.

Reviewed by Karen Steffen Chung, National Taiwan University

At its heart, this book is an argument for making semantics a supporting pillar of morphological analysis. It is divided into six chapters: 'Negation', 'Derivation', 'Category', 'Domain', 'Construal', and 'Conclusion'.

H first devotes considerable space to a literature review of such approaches to morphological analysis as item-and-process and item-and-arrangement. The approach that he contrasts to these and advocates in this study is cognitive linguistic. By this he means that instead of viewing morphemes as building blocks with static meanings that are strung together by rules, the meaning of a composite linguistic expression emerges from highly structured background knowledge, with the component parts interacting dynamically to convey aspects of the expression's meaning.

One of the author's theses is that no two distinct linguistic forms are completely synonymous and chooses English prefixes with negative meanings as his case in point. His method entails examination of pairs of words in which negative prefixes with close yet contrasting meanings can attach to the same base, e.g. *dis-* and *mis-* in *distrust* and *mistrust*, respectively. The contrast between the two, he says, is to be found in the differing construal of the two words and in the words they collocate with; *distrust*, for example, tends to collocate with people (foreigner, judge, salesman), and *mistrust* with things (computer, hospital, system).

H believes that one should try to capture the relatedness of morphemes used in different senses by viewing them as polysemes rather than homonyms. For example, he gives 'move away from' as the prototypical meaning of *ab-*, and 'wrongly perform' and 'release' as more peripheral meanings of the same core concept.

The negative prefixes covered in this study are: *a-*, *ab-*, *anti-*, *contra-*, *counter-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *in-*, *mal-*, *mis-*, *non-*, *pseudo-*, *quasi-*, *semi-*, *sub-*, *un-*, and *under-*, coming from Greek, Latin, French and Old English. Some of these, however, are not negative in denotation, like the Latin partitive *semi-* 'partly, half' (Greek *hemi-* is not included) and the Latin *quasi-* 'closely resembling' (Greek *para-* is not included).

The author used two main corpora to collect his examples, the British National Corpus and the entire Internet via Google. The Internet is a godsend for linguistic corpus work, but it does require careful filtering and judgment. Some forms cited in the book were unfamiliar, e.g. *indiscipline*, some UK-specific, e.g. *non-iron* [shirts] (vs. US *no-iron*), and some of the contrasted forms in Ch. 5 were relatively uncommon words, e.g. *defrock* vs. *unfrock*, which might make one question the representativeness and coverage of the data.

The writing is clear but occasionally a bit awkward stylistically, and the English has a non-native feel about it. However, the content is solid and the logic easy to follow, so this is a minor shortcoming. Overall, this book is worth careful consideration for its contribution to morphology by offering a new angle from which to approach it.