# Contents

**Preface**  xi  
Organization of the book  xi  
Notation  xii  
Acknowledgements  xiii  

1. Introduction  1  
  1.1. The problems  2  
    1.1.1. Semantic interpretation  2  
    1.1.2. Word sense and case slot disambiguation  4  
    1.1.3. Syntactic disambiguation  9  
  1.2. Frames  12  
  1.3. Artificial intelligence research at Brown University  15  
    1.3.1. The Frail frame language  16  
    1.3.2. The Paragram parser  18  
  1.4. Policy statements  20  

Part I  SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION  

2. Semantic interpretation  25  
  2.1. Introduction  25  
  2.2. Semantic interpretation and linguistic theory  28  
    2.2.1. Decompositional semantics  28  
    2.2.2. Model-theoretic and truth-conditional semantics  29  
  2.3. Semantic interpretation and artificial intelligence  33  
    2.3.1. Procedural semantics and Woods’ semantic interpreter  34  
    2.3.2. Knowledge semantics  39  
    2.3.3. Object-oriented semantics  41  
  2.4. Psycholinguistic research on semantic interpretation  42  
  2.5. Qualities desirable in a semantic interpreter  43
Contents

3. The Absity semantic interpreter 44
   3.1. Introduction 44
   3.2. Two strategies: Strong typing and tandem processing 44
   3.3. The typing system of Absity 46
   3.4. Another strategy: Turning meaningful syntax into words 50
   3.5. The semantic rules of Absity 52
   3.6. Implementation details 56
   3.7. Absity as the fulfillment of our dreams 58
   3.8. What Absity can’t do yet 59
   3.9. Conclusion 72

Part II  LEXICAL DISAMBIGUATION

4. Lexical disambiguation 77
   4.1. What is necessary for lexical disambiguation? 77
   4.2. Lexical disambiguation research in AI 80
      4.2.1. Wilks: Preference semantics 80
      4.2.2. Boguraev: Semantic judgments 81
      4.2.3. Hayes: Disambiguation with frames and associations 82
      4.2.4. Small: Word expert parsing 83
   4.3. Psycholinguistic research on lexical disambiguation 84
      4.3.1. Semantic priming and spreading activation 86
      4.3.2. Phoneme monitoring and prior choice activation models 87
      4.3.3. The ordered search hypothesis 90
      4.3.4. Semantic priming and the all-readings hypothesis 92
      4.3.5. Conclusion 94

5. Polaroid Words 96
   5.1. Introduction 96
   5.2. Marker passing 97
      5.2.1. Marker passing in Frail 98
      5.2.2. Lexical disambiguation with marker passing 100
      5.2.3. Constraining marker passing 101
   5.3. Polaroid Words 102
      5.3.1. What Polaroid Words look like 102
      5.3.2. How Polaroid Words operate 106
      5.3.3. An example of Polaroid Words in action 108
      5.3.4. Recovery from doubt 110
      5.3.5. Polaroid Words for bound constituents 112
      5.3.6. Cues unused 113
   5.4. What Polaroid Words can’t do 115
   5.5. Slot restriction predicates and selectional restrictions 117
Contents

5.6. Psychological reality 118
   5.6.1. Polaroid Words; marker passing, and psycholinguistic models 118
   5.6.2. Psychological non-reality 121
   5.6.3. Marker passing, path strength, and magic numbers 124
5.7. Conclusion 125

Part III  STRUCTURAL DISAMBIGUATION

6. Structural disambiguation 131
   6.1. Introduction 131
   6.2. Types of structural ambiguity 131
      6.2.1. Attachment problems 131
      6.2.2. Gap finding and filling 136
      6.2.3. Analytical ambiguities 137
      6.2.4. The interaction between categorial and structural ambiguity 149
      6.2.5. Structural ambiguity as a closure problem 150
   6.3. Current theories of structural disambiguation 152
      6.3.1. Structural disambiguation in ATN parsers 152
      6.3.2. Structural disambiguation in Marcus parsers 153
      6.3.3. Ford, Bresnan, and Kaplan's theory of closure 155
      6.3.4. Structural disambiguation as presupposition minimization 158
   6.4. Conclusion 162

7. The Semantic Enquiry Desk 164
   7.1. Introduction 164
   7.2. Prepositional phrase attachment 165
      7.2.1. Where prepositional phrases may be attached 165
      7.2.2. Determinants of prepositional phrase attachment 166
      7.2.3. Verb annotations 168
      7.2.4. Plausibility 168
      7.2.5. Testing for presupposition satisfaction 170
      7.2.6. Making the attachment decision 172
      7.2.7. Muffling combinatorial explosions 175
   7.3. Gap finding in relative clauses 177
      7.3.1. Why gap finding is difficult 177
      7.3.2. How to find gaps 178
   7.4. Methods for other structural ambiguities 182
      7.4.1. Particle detection 182
      7.4.2. Relative clause attachment 184
      7.4.3. Adverb attachment 184
   7.5. Conclusion 186
Part IV CONCLUSION

8. Conclusion 189
   8.1. Towards a conclusion 189
   8.2. The work in review 189
      8.2.1. What has been achieved 189
      8.2.2. Implicit claims 190
      8.2.3. Applications of the work 192
   8.3. Related work of others 192
      8.3.1. Semantic interpretation and disambiguation 193
      8.3.2. Knowledge representation for language understanding 199
      8.3.3. Spreading activation in natural language systems 199
      8.3.4. Lexical disambiguation in text databases 200

9. Speculations, Partially Baked Ideas, and Exercises for the Reader 202
   9.1. The representation of knowledge 202
   9.2. Semantic formalisms 207
   9.3. Semantic interpretation and discourse pragmatics 209
   9.4. Lexical ambiguity 212
   9.5. Structural ambiguity 215
   9.6. None of the above 220

References 225

Index of names 251

Index of subjects 256