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The Geometry Of Meaning: Semantics Based On Conceptual Spaces (MIT Press)



Synopsis

In *The Geometry of Meaning*, Peter Gärdenfors proposes a theory of semantics that bridges cognitive science and linguistics and shows how theories of cognitive processes, in particular concept formation, can be exploited in a general semantic model. He argues that our minds organize the information involved in communicative acts in a format that can be modeled in geometric or topological terms -- in what he terms conceptual spaces, extending the theory he presented in an earlier book by that name. Many semantic theories consider the meanings of words as relatively stable and independent of the communicative context. Gärdenfors focuses instead on how various forms of communication establish a system of meanings that becomes shared between interlocutors. He argues that these "meetings of mind" depend on the underlying geometric structures, and that these structures facilitate language learning. Turning to lexical semantics, Gärdenfors argues that a unified theory of word meaning can be developed by using conceptual spaces. He shows that the meaning of different word classes can be given a cognitive grounding, and offers semantic analyses of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and prepositions. He also presents models of how the meanings of words are composed to form new meanings and of the basic semantic role of sentences. Finally, he considers the future implications of his theory for robot semantics and the Semantic Web.

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Customer Reviews

Peter Gärdenfors is creating a new science of meaning. The recent ideas, expressed so clearly in

The Geometry of Meaning, make his achievement even more impressive. The book leaves us with the impression that semantics may be a tractable problem after all. (Jean-Louis Dessalles, School of Telecom, ParisTech)Gärdenfors has found an impressive hammer and now many issues in semantics look like nails. (Guy Dove Mind)

Peter Gärdenfors is Professor of Cognitive Science at Lund University, Sweden. He is the author of Conceptual Spaces: The Geometry of Thought (MIT Press) and other books.

Although I am not in the cognitive field and not at all linguist - but on computer science with some interest and knowledge on NLP -, I must say that I have been particularly impressed by the content of this book. What a change for me with some of my readings on knowledge related to ontologies, inferences, etc., and other ugly stuffs, where those readings give the feeling that AI related to words is enormously difficult for tiny results. Here, the theory and related methodology is very well explained; and limits are clearly highlighted by the author. And above all: the given examples - which are often subtle examples of the natural language - fit so well with the approach !! I understand that this book is not the 1st one where the author unveils his theory on conceptual space but rather the last production of a number of works which have been previously published. Yet, this reads easily with no strong particular knowledge and is a self-sufficient volume. As a bad minor point, figures look old-fashioned, but you should not pass your way for this reason. See his conclusion on semantic web (= "this is not the way to go").

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