

Meaningful Grammar

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Abstract

Grammatical structure is meaningful in at least three respects: It is symbolic as a pairing of form and meaning, it is to a large part motivated, and it invites implicatures. These meaningful aspects of grammar relate to the language users' cognitive abilities. The cognitive underpinning of language is demonstrated in the areas of time/tense and modality.

Notions of time are in English expressed lexically, grammatically, and lexico-grammatically as in the be going to-Future. The development of the be going to-construction to become a future marker is motivated by implicature and conceptual metonymy, and its present-day grammatical usages relate to its lexical basis by conceptual metaphor.

Notions of modality are typically expressed by modal verbs, and the same modals are used to express different kinds of modality. Epistemic and deontic modality and share the property of force dynamics: Deontic modality as in You must go involves a socio-physical force while epistemic modality as in It must be true involves the mental force of reasoning. A commonality shared by all types of modality is that the conceptualizer does not accept the situation referred to as real and strives to bring its potential realization under control.

Grammatical units tend to be polysemous. Polysemy is, however, tolerated when the meanings of the linguistic sign are conceptually connected and relatable to a common, higher-level meaning.

Keywords: English; Grammar; Motivation; Implicature; Time; Modality.