



From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics)

Eve Sweetser

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This book offers a new approach to the analysis of the multiple meanings of English modals, conjunctions, conditionals, and perception verbs. Although such ambiguities cannot easily be accounted for by feature-analyses of word meaning, Eve Sweetser's argument shows that they can be analyzed both readily and systematically. Meaning relationships in general cannot be understood independently of human cognitive structure, including the metaphorical and cultural aspects of that structure. Sweetser shows that both lexical polysemy and pragmatic ambiguity are shaped by our metaphorical folk understanding of epistemic processes and of speech interaction. Similar regularities can be shown to structure the contrast among root, epistemic and speech act uses of modal verbs, multiple uses of conjunctions and conditionals, and certain processes of historical change observed in Indo-European languages. Since polysemy is typically the intermediate step in semantic change, the same regularities observable in polysemy can be extended to an analysis of semantic change.

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