

**Looking back, looking forward:
The emergence of grammatical meaning**

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This contribution looks back to the conundrum that meaning presented to linguists emerging from the structuralist era into the cognitive era. It reviews the powerful influence of Roman Jakobson on the analysis of meaning as decomposable into abstract features and the alternate view that meaning categories have prototype structure. Here I elaborate the latter approach by treating grammatical meaning as the outcome of the dynamic process of grammaticalization which leads to crosslinguistically common categories (gram-types). Taking the analysis of modality as the example, I argue that gram-types (such as obligation, permission, root or epistemic possibility) are attractors in a complex adaptive system. These attractors are similar to ecological niches in that they are determined by a complex interaction of a number of dimensions, including the cognitive, social and interactional. Diagnostics for identifying attractor functions across and within languages are the existence of a grammatical form dedicated to that function, spread of grammaticalizing forms to encompass that function, the frequency of expression in corpora, and frequency of mention in grammatical descriptions.