

Abstract

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This thesis investigates the concept of emotive meaning, which has been used in numerous versions during the last decade to explain and describe linguistic evaluation. It examines how emotive meaning is constructed within the frames of different semantic theories, how it works in empirical studies, and the thesis aims, furthermore, to expose alternative possibilities to understand and study evaluation, which tend to be overlooked in earlier research.

The construction of emotive meaning is shown to be based on two theoretical assumptions commonly adopted within semantic theory: firstly that meaning can be explained with reference to something outside language (i.e. correspondence), secondly that the meaning of a larger whole can be deduced from the meaning of its parts (i.e. compositionality). Accordingly, the central questions of this theoretical discourse are what evaluation corresponds to, and how evaluating words are to be delimited. This perspective is proved to be less fruitful for a study of evaluation which goes beyond some cardinal example words in their typical contexts.

One possibility put forward by this thesis is to take as a point of departure the question of what people are doing when using language to evaluate. This alternative perspective is applied by the use of Systemic Functional Linguistics in an analysis of a conversation. The analysis shows how the evaluating activities of the speakers can be described on various levels without necessarily ascribing emotive meaning to decontextualized words.

Key words: emotive meaning; evaluation; systemic functional linguistics; conversation analysis; history of linguistics; emotivism; modality

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