

Ronald W. Langacker
University of California, San Diego

MODALS: STRIVING FOR CONTROL

To be alive is to be engaged in the striving for control. In the case of humans, this takes many forms and occurs on different levels: physical, perceptual, mental, social. Language is both an instrument and a product of this striving, which thus has numerous linguistic reflexes. In particular, it is evident in modals, as the basis for their force-dynamic nature. The generally successful description of modals along these lines, in English and other languages, has left certain classic issues unresolved. One such issue is “transparency”, the characteristic property of so-called “raising” constructions. Another is the distinction between “root” and “epistemic” modals. A third is the grammatical status of modal elements (e.g. as “main” vs. “auxiliary” verbs). Though related, these issues are distinct and largely independent. They can only be resolved through clarification of the conceptual factors involved. In each case the notion of striving for control proves to be a central factor.

Ronald W. Langacker received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Illinois in 1966. He was a professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, San Diego from that time until his retirement in 2003. During this period, 31 graduate students received their Ph.D. under his supervision, and 48 Visiting Scholars spent time at UCSD under his sponsorship. He now holds the position of Research Professor.

After his training and early research in generative syntactic theory, Langacker largely devoted the first ten years of his professional career to the comparative grammar and historical reconstruction of the Uto-Aztecan family of Native American languages. In 1976, deciding that a radically different theoretical approach to language was necessary, he began developing the framework that has come to be known as “cognitive grammar”. A fundamental statement of that framework, the two volume work titled *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, was published in 1987 and 1991. Through the years, cognitive grammar has continued to be refined, further articulated, and applied to a progressively wider range of languages and phenomena. An interim summary, *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*, appeared in 2008.

Langacker is a founding member of the International Cognitive Linguistics Association and served as its president from 1997-99. He was chair of the organizing committee for the 2001 International Cognitive Linguistics Conference. He was a co-editor (and is now an honorary editor) of the monograph series *Cognitive Linguistics Research*, and serves as a member of numerous editorial and advisory boards. He has published other books and many articles dealing with a broad array of issues in cognitive linguistics.