

Thomas Meier

Structural Realism in Generative Grammar

Structural realism affirms that, when our theories change, what is always retained is their structural content and that there is structural continuity between our theories, even through radical theory change. Since the revival of the debate by Worrall (1989), mainly two views have been developed. Epistemic structural realism is the view that our knowledge of the physical world is restricted to knowledge about structure. Ontic structural realism affirms that all that exists in the world is structure, and that objects are always ontologically subordinated to the structures in which they appear. Both views have been motivated mainly out of physics. In this talk, I will discuss how structural realism can be formulated for generative grammar, both in its epistemic and its ontic version. To this effect, I will concentrate on the notion of structural continuity through theory change in the stage of the early development of generative grammar. Especially the shift from earlier theories of structural linguistics (Bloomfield, Harris) to generative grammar and their theoretical notions will be of importance.