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The focus of this dissertation is the form *how*. The goal is to account for the distribution of *how*, which I will propose is a monosemous form with a single invariant meaning. This claim presents a challenge to traditional analyses, which have posited at least three categories for the form: manner adverb ('how to make lasagna'), intensifier ('how far/how many') and complementizer (this role is applied to situations where *how* is believed to be interpreted as an informal version of 'that,' as in, 'He said how nobody likes the new policy'). Employing Columbia School's strict distinction between *meaning* and *message* (Reid 2018, Stern 2019), the dissertation will argue that these traditional categories reflect *messages* – contextually dependent interpretations. These messages all fit *how*'s more abstract, stable *meaning*: that elaborating/characterizing information is relevant to the utterance and its surrounding discourse.

This hypothesized meaning will be shown to account for the significant ambiguity between the three categories summarized above. The fact that many tokens of *how* could be interpreted as a manner adverb or a complementizer (Willis 2007, van Gelderen 2013), and that some tokens where *how* is classified as a complementizer seem to have a mild sense of degree (van Gelderen 2013, 2015; Greenbaum 1996: 146), suggests that there is only one *how*.

An additional claim of the dissertation will be that the failure of existing categories to account for *how*'s distribution is based on a tacit commitment to a referential view of language. This is one in which words generally point to external reality. I will emphasize that the frequent ambiguity between manner adverb and complementizer *how* arises from the fact that the form often alludes to both sentence-level and discourse-level information. The latter kind of information, I will show, cannot be accounted for in referential terms. However, it can be accounted for through the monosemic approach adopted in this project, because this approach is not rooted in the sentence as an organizing unit or the presumption that language is a nomenclature -- a system of labels for external reality (Otheguy 2002, Reid 2004).

Data will be drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; Davies 2008- ) and at least one full-length novel (O'Brien 1991). In addition, surveys on English speakers' perceptions of *how*'s meaning in different situations may be employed.