I will be concerned with meaning variations in the verbal domain, which are usually handled in terms of lexical polysemy or non-compositional reinterpretation. By way of contrast, I will account for the phenomena as instances of conceptual differentiation and conceptual shifting performed on the grammatically determined meaning of verbal expressions, respectively.

My point of departure is that the linguistic form drastically underdetermines the conceptual information that is conveyed with an utterance. Consequently, I suppose a general framework which makes a distinction between two basic phases of understanding process. In the phase of grammatical computation the context-independent and, hence, merely formal meaning of the utterance is calculated in accordance with the principle of semantic compositionality. In the phase of interpretation its contextually specified meaning is derived by pragmatic inferences integrating the abstract meaning base with accessible elements of conceptual knowledge. In concretizing this picture, I offer a model in which the content of utterance, starting from the level of semantic form, has to be elaborated step by step in a sequence of levels of meaning.

In view of the fact that most verbs are open to a multitude of primary meaning variants I argue for a minimalistic approach to their lexical-semantic form which allows of conceptual differentiations of them by fixing parameters involved. Essentially, the strategy of radical underspecification is also applied to the problem of deviating interpretations of verbs or verbal expressions being syntactically complex. My basic assumption is that in the course of compositional derivation further parameters are introduced by obligatory insertion of certain general schemata. If required these parameters are available to a fixation by means of which a suitable conceptual shifting is realized.