

## Semantics of Parts of Speech and Semantics of Relations (examples in Tagalog)

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It has often been said that grammatical relations have no sense. Maybe but they cover phenomena very different from a language to another, and these phenomena pertain to semantics.

Thus subject-predicate relation covers different modes of attributing the signified of the predicate to the signified of the subject of this predicate. The sign + of the famous chomskyan formula  $S \rightarrow NP + VP$  represents quite different things from a language to another. Subject-predicate relation cannot be the same in languages where all the major parts of speech have exactly the same behaviour as regards functions and in other languages where, for instance, verb behaves a way of its own, quite different from that of nouns, and is necessarily present in all the predicates at least as a copula.

Observe firstly the identical behaviour of Tagalog nouns, adjectives and verbs when predicate:

- ex. 1 *kumuha ng libro ang bata* "a/the child got a book"  
having-got book child
- ex. 2 *kinuha ng bata ang libro* "the book was got by a/the child"  
being-got child book
- ex. 3 *maganda ang dalaga* "a/the girl is pretty"  
pretty girl
- ex. 4 *doktor si Pedro* "Pedro is a doctor"  
doctor

and when attribute (relativization):

- ex. 5 *bata-ng kumuha ng libro* "child who got (having-got) a book"  
child having-got book
- ex. 6 *libro-ng kinuha ng bata* "book which the child got (got by the child)"  
book got child
- ex. 7 *dalaga-ng maganda* "girl who is (being) pretty"  
girl pretty  
*maganda-ng dalaga* "pretty girl"  
pretty girl
- ex. 8 *si Pedro-ng doktor* "Pedro the doctor"  
doctor

Here the transformation will consist only in preposing the *na* marker and (-ng

ex. 9 (ang doktor) ang kumuha ng libro "the one who got a book  
having-got book (is the doctor)"

ex. 10 (ang libro) ang kinuha ng bata "the one which was got by the child  
book is-got child (is the book)"

ex. 11 (ang maganda (si Maria) "(Maria is) the pretty one"  
pretty

ex. 12 *ang doktor (si Pedro)* "(Pedro is) the doctor"  
doctor

But the problem is: how to explain such facts? I'll answer: by semantics.

A first basic principle is not to treat differently what is alike: the identical behaviours of nouns, adjectives and verbs as to substantivization, relativization and predicative function define a particular distribution and semantics of parts of speech: as long as functions are concerned, they form only one "superpart" of speech.

If we translate or gloss all parts of speech by means of a "being X" or of a "doing X", all become clear. The verb itself is orientated towards the term to which it refers like an adjective or a noun: *dalagang maganda* (ex. 7) can be translated into "girl being pretty" and *ang maganda* (ex. 11) "a pretty one"; so, *ang kumuha ng libro* (ex. 9) can be translated into "the one having got a book". The verb functions always as a kind of participle or verbal adjective: when it is the predicate, the sentence must be understood as a kind of nominal sentence with a participle as predicate and without copula as it exists in Sanskrit: for example (ex. 13): *sa was dṛṣṭavān* (without sandhi) which means "he=having-seen you". So, *kumuha ng libro ang bata* (ex. 1) must be understood as "a/the child (is) getting a book". The Middle Ages rewriting rule (ex. 14) *cantata=est + cantans* is a reality and no longer a fiction in this type of languages except that there is no copula but mere juxtaposition and preposing to mark the predicate. And as the three major parts of speech, which all can be predicate, behave alike, we can say that they all must be understood everywhere as "being X" and even *ang doktor* is basically "the one being a doctor". Then we can understand why verbs can be substantivized or function as an attribute exactly in the same way as noun and without any change of form. All that defines a peculiar mode of orientation.

The comparison between equative and non-equative sentences enables us to understand another side of the semantics of parts of speech. Through non-equative sentences (as ex. 1, 4), we are only told that Pedro has the quality of being a doctor or of getting a book, while through equative sentences (ex. 9, 12)

we are told that the child or Pedro is the same person as the one who has been previously identified as a doctor or as having got a book. *ang* indicates persons or things as individualized while  $\emptyset$ —that is to say every major part of speech used alone—indicates the quality of being something; *ang* indicates substances and  $\emptyset$  attributes in the traditional philosophical sense of the words; I prefer to name this superpart of speech “qualificatives” in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

Such distribution and meaning of parts of speech have implications as to semantics of all grammatical relations. The subject-predicate relation is a relation of equivalence between two qualificatives. In ex. 1, as well as in ex. 9, *bata* and *kumuha ng libro* are in fact two equivalent designations of one and the same object of the real in a given situation, that is why both can be substantivized in order to name this object.

Tagalog and English or French, for example, use very different ways to express the relation between the child and the action itself of getting. In Tagalog, there is on one side, a relation of equivalence between “child” and “(one) having got”, and on the other side, the relation between “having got” and the action of “getting” as an abstract idea without particular orientation: there is in Tagalog a series of what I have called participles expressing the qualities of the different possible participants in a given process, such as actor, patient, beneficiary, goal, location, purpose, and all the other well-known focuses proper to Philippinian languages, but all these qualificatives, derived from a same stem by different affixes, are always in the same relation of equivalence with the word they qualify.

In French, for example, in *l'enfant obtient*, *obtient* is orientated towards the prime actant or subject which is the actor like the tagalog *kumuha*, but the mode of orientation is quite different and, as *obtient* is not *obtenant* or *qui obtient*, it is not possible to speak of equivalence relation in the precise sense in which I have used this word here.

How does Tagalog express relations other than those expressed inside of the verbal qualificative? Tagalog distinguishes only three relations between the elements of the real as expressed by words: firstly, the already mentioned relation of equivalence—between subject and predicate and between the two terms linked by means of *na*; secondly, a relation marked by *ng*, and thirdly, another one marked by *sa* and other markers containing *sa*. These markers introduce noun extensions as well as governed complements and even adverbials and predicates in the case of *sa*. Thus *ng* is a genitive accusative and actor marker!

We are again in front of puzzling homologies. Semantics appears again to provide the key of the mystery. Instead of considering these markers to be purely grammatical and even to constitute as many homophonous items as there are functions, it is preferable to look for a constant meaning proper to each marker throughout its different uses since function is sufficiently marked by the sequential constraints: noun, adjective, numeral extensions are postposed to head noun, adjective or number; predicate *sa* phrases are at the first place in

the sentence as all predicates; verbal complements and adverbials are not integrated, but in spite of some sequential freedom, there may be a significant preferential word order.

*ng* expresses close relationships such as possession, relation between a part and the whole, intrinsic characteristic, when introducing a noun extension; when introducing a verb extension, *ng* expresses the relation between actor or patient and the action, since they are the closest participant (ex. 1, 2). *sa* expresses looser relationships such as direction and circumstances when introducing complements, as well as adverbials or predicates.

Thus there are three relations: equivalence versus close relationship versus loose relationship. To choose between them is a matter of real situation: it depends upon the situation that Pedro is identical with the doctor or that the car is belonging to Pedro, and so on. It is a matter of situation once given the categorization of the real according to which the language, as every language, must classify the elements of the real.

Is this semantics? Yes it is if categorizations are the very basis from which the informal reference is transformed into something discrete and articulate which can be communicated. It is grammatical as far as the classification of the elements of the real into parts of speech and subclasses of parts of speech as well as the classification of the relations between these elements are facts of language. But the expression of these real relations and the indication of the hierarchy of the utterances (through topicalisation and subordinations of all kinds) are not the same thing and here, the word "grammatical" is, as often, ambiguous.

Semantics has been the only way, firstly, for preserving the logic of the system of the language and even for identifying a certain kind of information communicated by the language (an abstract, logical one such as categorization of the elements of the real and of the relations between them), secondly to found a general linguistics or a typology capable of explaining and not only stating the homologies and other specific facts.