Semantic Structures in English and Atsugewi

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to the memory of my father

Isaac

and with love to my mother

Esther

and my brother

Shel

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Introduction

00. The Contents of this Paper

The general approach repeated throughout the theoretical portion of this paper (Part I and the Appendix to Part I) is to proceed from the semantic to the syntactic and from the language-general to the language-particular. Thus, in each segment of the theoretical portion (not always coterminous with a numbered section), the following are introduced in order:

--a putatively-universal, semantic 'situation-type' (a number of these are distinguished: see below);

--a putatively-universal underlying syntactic structure which specifies the semantic situation-type;

--and a number of derivational patterns which operate on the underlying syntactic structure to produce the surface structures typical (and some less typical) of particular languages.

Among the semantic situation-types treated are those in which, loosely put,

one object moves or is located with respect to another object (the 'translatory' situation, sections 1 - 3),

one object exerts force on another object
(the 'adactive' situation, section 5.1),

one event causes another event
(the 'causative' situation, section 5.2),

an entity effects an event
(the 'effective' situation, section 5.3),

an event affects an entity
(the 'adventive' situation, section 5.4),

one entity induces another to effect an event
(the 'inducive' situation, section 5.5),

an object (or set of objects) moves or is located with respect to itself
(the 'self-referencing translatory' situation, section 8),

one object (or set of objects) moves or is located with respect to itself while it moves or is located with respect to another object
(the 'temporal' situation, section 9).

The particular languages treated -- vis-à-vis the derivational patterns which lead to their typical and less typical surface structures -- are, in Part I, English and Atsugewi (see below in section 0 for a note on this language) and, in the Appendix, English, Russian, and Spanish.

Among the additional issues discussed in the course of the exposition in Part I are:

-- the characteristics of the human mind's capacity to impose structure on experiential phenomena whereby they are rendered suitable for specification by language (beginning of section 5);

-- the multiple specification in a syntactic structure of a single component of a semantic situation (sections 3.3, 4.2);

-- the 'backgrounding' or 'foregrounding' of information and the differential efficiency with which various types of information are specified in the English vs. the Atsugewi sentence (section 4.1);

-- 'systems' of morphemes in a language which (approximately) exhaustively partition a semantic realm into non-overlapping areas (sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 5.211, 5.32);

-- a new account for 'instrument' and 'WITH-phrase' (sections 5.2, 5.3) involving: the semantic function of a component in its immediate situation and its 'transvalued' function in a more inclusive situation (section 5.21);

-- some reinterpretations of personal pronominal systems (section 3.5);

and in the Appendix to Part I:

-- universal 'motion/location structures', involving such primitive notions as a 'point or extent of space or time' (section 10.1);

-- the 'DIRECTIONAL-specifying satellite', a characteristic syntactic feature of Indo-European languages, here illustrated for English and Russian (section 10.2);

-- the derivational pattern most typical of Spanish, here set against those already treated for English and Atsugewi as a third point of comparison (section 10.3);

-- a systematic exposition of the various syntactic fates met by underlying 'FIGURE'- and 'GROUND'-specifying nominals in deriving to the surface (section 10.4);

--a sketch of how more complex structures 'conflate' into simpler ones (section 10.5).

Part I may be considered of a piece with the Appendix in content, differing from it mainly in pace. In particular, Part I covers less ground with greater rigor while the Appendix covers more ground more casually. The dense, formal style of writing throughout, while it offers some obstacles, has been thought a more appropriate medium in which to introduce theoretical material. The difficulties inherent in presenting a novel coherent system -- e.g., the lack of any clear-cut entry point which does not itself depend on notions from elsewhere in the system -- may have rendered Part I with its Appendix hard to integrate on a single time through.

The non-theoretical portion of this paper (Parts II and III) presents Atsugewi forms and examples, fully analyzed in accordance with

the theoretical notions of the first portion of the paper. Perhaps not the least value of the paper as a whole is the extent to which it investigates Atsugewi, which, as a language exotically distant from English, commends our studying it in its own right. For me, it has also been a pleasure to offer an account of a language towards which, if a linguist may be permitted, I have come to feel a great affection. More significant for the main thesis of this paper, however, is the fact that in comparing Atsugewi and English -- as different from each other as two of the world's languages might be -- one discovers and can characterize a core common to both.

0. A Note on Atsugewi

0.1 The Cultural Setting

Atsugewi is an American Indian language of the Hokan family (which also includes the Pomo and Yuman languages). The traditional homeland of the Atsugewi people is just north of Mount Lassen in northern California. Although the tribe was never large, apparently averaging some 300 people, its numbers have diminished. The number of those that can speak the language has dwindled irreversibly, so that today Atsugewi is spoken impeccably by perhaps only one person and well by no more than five -- none of them young.

0.2 A Sketch of the Surface Structure of the Sentential-Verb

In the derivation of an underlying structure, a constituent which has moved into adjunction with the verb will be termed a *satellite* to the verb; the verb together with all satellites which are present will be said to constitute the *verb-complex*. In English, the surface verb-complex typically consists of the verb alone or of the verb with one satellite (either affixal or independent).* In Atsugewi, by contrast, the surface verb-complex typically consists of the verb (always a bound root) and numerous satellites (always affixal). Typically, in fact, it contains representatives of all the criterial constituents of an underlying structure and can stand alone as a complete sentence in itself. This (polysynthetic) surface-structural entity may thus be appropriately termed the *sentential verb-complex* or, for short, the *sentential-verb*. Although in the course of Part I the syntactic processes by which several types of underlying structure derive into a surface sentential-verb will be detailed, it is perhaps helpful to provide at this point a brief sketch of the sentential-verb's structure.

The surface sentential-verb of Atsugewi is composed of over twenty position-slots. The position-slot occupied by the root has the approximately centralmost location. The position-slot immediately preceding that of the

*E.g., loosely, the adverbial constituent *at the wrong time* (better: *not ... at the right time*) lexicalizes into the satellite *mis-* of the verb-complex *misfire*, as in *the engine misfired*; and the adverbial constituent *again from the beginning* lexicalizes into the satellite *over* of the verb-complex *start over*, as in *the record started over*.

root is occupied by a member of one of four distinct systems of morphemes: the FIGURE-specifying, the GROUND-specifying, the FROM-clause-replacing, and the BY-clause-replacing prefixes. A train of position-slots immediately following the root is occupied by members of another system of morphemes: the DIRECTIONAL+GROUND-specifying suffixes. The centralmost, prefixal, and suffixal position-slots just indicated comprise the surface-structural core of the sentential-verb and the morphemes which occupy them for the most part represent the semantically most contentful components of the underlying structure.

Surrounding the core of the sentential-verb is an inner periphery of position-slots occupied by morphemes which specify notions of evidence, manner, aspect and the like, such as:

V quickly (hurry up and V)	almost V still V	go and V go V-ing along
V badly (mal-V)	repeatedly V V again, back (re-V)	come V-ing along V in passing
V a little	V awhile	V in accompaniment
V a lot	(stay awhile and V)	with someone
un-V	finish V-ing	V in conjunction with someone
		V for the benefit of someone
		have someone V

Surrounding the inner periphery, the outer periphery of position-slots is occupied by the inflectional morphemes, which specify mode, and person and number (for both subject and object). Any particular set of inflectional morphemes, taken as a whole, specifies a particular constellation of values for the above semantic categories, but there is virtually no one-one correspondence between any single morpheme and any single meaning-component.

With regard to surface-structural well-formedness, in any sentential-verb the core and the outer periphery must be represented, whereas the inner periphery is for the most part only optionally represented. Within the core, the root must be present; a prefix must also be present before most roots -- such roots are the only kind treated in this paper, -- but is impossible before the remaining roots; a suffix must be present after some roots, is optional after others, and is impossible after the rest. It is apparently possible only in principle and not in performance for all twenty-and-some position-slots of the sentential-verb to be filled.

In Part I of this paper, attention is given primarily to the semantic and syntactic underpinnings of the core of the sentential-verb, secondarily to those of the outer periphery, and not at all to those of the inner periphery.