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Semantic Role-Marking in Lunyore Morphology and Syntax

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Abstract: Semantic roles denote different semantic relations that a noun phrase plays with respect to the action or state described by a predicate of a sentence. Semantic is another universal feature of language, if there is an event involving more than one participant, the speaker and the hearer care to know who is the agent, who is the patient or who is the experiencer and who is the stimulus. There seem to be some languages that, despite this obvious concern, do not mark semantic role in any consistent way. The key objective is to examine semantic role-marking in Lunyore morphology and syntax. Descriptive research design was adopted and the target population was the people of Emuhaya Sub county in Vihiga county. Purposive sampling technique was applied to gather head-marked phrases from churches, baraza sessions and Lunyore texts. The research instruments included conversations, written texts from Lunyore, participant and non-participant observations until saturation stage was attained. Data was analyzed through descriptive form. It was found that semantic role-marking was influenced by the morphological structure of the head-marked phrase. The study also found that there is a syntactic and semantic relationship in head-marked phrases. Theta theory was applicable in examining the semantic role marking in Lunyore head-marked phrases.
Keywords: Semantic, morphology, syntax.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Semantics is the study of how languages organize and express meanings. It is a branch of linguistics that deals with the meanings of words, phrases and sentences.

Dowt (1991) observes that semantic relations are purely semantic descriptions of the way in which a constituent function with respect to the meaning of the action described by the verb or other constituents of a sentence.

Clause argument's semantic role is a universal feature of language. In particular, if there is an event involving more than one participant, the speaker and the hearer care to know who is the agent, who is the patient and who is the stimulus. There seems to be some languages that do not mark semantic roles despite this concern. This study investigates the place of Lunyore within the typological classification based on phenomenon of head-marking of semantic roles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of role marking by means of nominal inflection morphology has long been taken for granted in Linguistics. Nichols (1986) drew general attention to the fact that the locus of role marking in a clause does not need to be restricted to nominal morphology. There exists a world-wide technique, that argument roles can be marked on the verb. Nichols' (1986) observations thus come clearly when she compared languages of two North Caucasian language families: Nakh-Daghestanian and Abkaz-Adyghean that are strikingly different in this respect. While the former use almost exclusively nominal cases to mark roles the latter sticks generally to marking roles on the verb. Nichol's observations positively informed on the study of semantic role-marking in Lunyore language.

Peterson (2007) analyzed semantic roles in Reluuli-Runyala applicatives, he observed that, Reluuli-Runyala has various semantic role features with both specialized and non-specialized applicative use. Similar to other Bantu languages like Kichaga (Bantu Tanzania),

the form of the morphological indicator does not change with the semantic roles of the applied object.

Jerro (2007) note that, four locative meanings (locative, path, goal and source) that may be constructed from applicative verbs are not exhaustive enough. Peterson (2007) illustrated certain cases of verb meanings in objects that can be assigned the semantic role of locatives, but seem language specific and carry unique pragmatic interpretations. Peterson (ibid) mentioned instances involving verbs like *biika,* "save", *sooka* "start" and pragmatic interpretations required in Kanga/kangira "stop that point" in command strategies. Recipient in Ruluuli-Runyala is used only with transitive verb bases which is not the case with Beneficiary (Bostoen, 2012).

The study on semantic role marking in Lunyore, unlike the study by Peterson, not only dwelt on applicatives but also analyzed semantic role-marking in other head-marked phrases like reciprocals, instrumentals, passives, causatives and locatives. The study went further and analyzed the semantic change that arise from role-marking phrases.

Atoh (2001) analyzed the semantic properties of Dholuo nouns with the aim of investigating if their relationships within given sentences are determined by their distinctive properties. Atoh (2001) concluded that Dholuo nouns fall within particular domains in which they share semantic space. They fall into these fields on account of family resemblance and common potential features for example family domain eg *wuore* (father), *miyo* (mother) and *ner* (uncle), domain of color, *rathar* (white) and *rabuor* (brown), domain of physical features, *aoro* (river) and *got* (mountain), domain of human beings; *dhako* (woman), *nyako* (girl) *dichuo* (male).

The analysis into domains revealed that there are relationships cutting across fields leading structural kind of network at the top whereby the primary conceptual word governs the direct and eventual components below it, making it relevant to our study. In the same connection Atoh (2001) sheds light on how possible it is to analyse nouns of any language semantically which is our main objective.

Baker (1985) postulated the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis proposing that identical thematic assignment hypothesis (UTAH) relationship between items are represented by identical structural relationships between those items at the level of D-structure. With a close observation of the theta roles assigned by the verbs, there seems to be no parallelisms between transitive and intransitive verbs. The following b-examples below, have only one argument, the subject argument but the verb is the same as in the a- examples where it has two arguments, the subject and the object argument. Notice that in the b- examples the subject argument does not have the same role as the subject of

the a- examples. However, the subject argument in b-examples have the same thematic roles as the object argument in a- examples. The traditional classification of verbs into transitive and intransitive fails to capture this parallelism (Wiltsehko, 2014).

a – John broke the window
b – The window broke all of a sudden
a – The wind moves the grass
b – The grass moves
a – John made dinner
b – Dinner is cooking

The examples above suggest that the syntactic ordering of the arguments in the clause do not match the linear ordering of the thematic roles of the arguments. Arguments can exchange positions in the clause but still the verb retains the thematic roles of the arguments involved in the event. The study on Lunyore semantic was accomplished through the use of theta theory.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design because it is within the qualitative paradigm. Creswell (1998) observes that descriptive approach is designed to obtain information concerning the current phenomenon and to draw valid conclusions from the facts discussed. The descriptive research design involves the knowledge of target language by the researcher. Descriptive design is effective where a large population needs to be studied and where techniques such as observations are involved. A design requires the researcher to be a native speaker of the language under study The target population includes people from Emuhaya Sub county in Vihiga county, in various social settings where the Lunyore was spoken. Phrases were sampled from church services, baraza sessions and personal interactions until saturation was attained. Data collection techniques were participant and non-participant observations.

Secondary data was collected from Lunyore texts (The hymn book and The Bible). Collected data was grouped into common linguistic characteristics. In line with the Theta theory of (2002) semantic role-marking, the study examined and analysed the semantic role-marking of Lunyore syntax and morphology. The analysis was in descriptive form.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study examined and described semantic role-marking in Lunyore. The study found that semantic role-marking was influenced by the morphological structure of a head-marked phrase.

The applicative roles in Lunyore are beneficiary. NPS are relevant to assignment semantic roles in Lunyore applicative phrases. The applicative is an argument increasing affix with one affix that can introduce locational and benefactive arguments. It emerged that, theta role of goal in locative phrase was

saturated. The verb is thematic subject of the causative phrase, where the locative is the internal argument of the predicate. Beneficial or patient roles semantic role-marking of beneficiary and patient. Semantic roles were also examined in Lunyore reciprocals. It was observed that Lunyore marks semantic roles in reciprocals. The semantic role interpretation indicate that the reciprocals receive the semantic role of both agent and patient or beneficiary.

According to Chomsky (2002), Theta theory is concerned with how semantic/thematic dependencies are represented in grammar. Theta theory divides the possible semantic dependencies into linguistically significant classes. Theta roles are a particular semantic terms that are used to describe the roles that the argument plays with respect to the predicate to which it is attached. Theta role is a particular way of representing the thematic restriction, technically called selection restriction on an argument to a verb. It is the theory that regulates the assignment of thematic roles onto a NP (Li, 1994). Hence it deals with the assignment of theta roles for examples, agent, theme, goal and source to the argument position to the syntactic structure. The basic principle of this theory is the theta criterion which holds at all levels of representation and establishes relative distribution of predicates and arguments. Chomsky (1981) posits that the criterion states that;

Each argument hears one and only one theta role and each theta role is assigned to only one and only one argument (p. 36). Consequently, the theta criterion holds that the theta roles are uniquely assigned and that the role is determined by lexical properties of the head and uniquely assigned to an argument. The idea of reciprocal head-marking appears to be rooted in efforts to provide a coherent account of the reciprocal relation that is evident in the semantic interpretation of expressions built from reciprocal verbs. Consider the phrase structure below;

Ba-siani na ba-khana ba-yanza-na
CL 10 boys and CL 10 girls SMTnS-like R em-FV
'boys and girls love each other'.

In the structure above, the phrase *ba-yanzana* (love each other) is marked by the morpheme *na* (each other) showing reciprocity. The sentence has its primary reading that, boys and girls love each other. Taking the standard approach to account for the initial interpretation, the assignment of semantic role is done in the argument structure. A general constraint in the assignment of semantic roles is that each semantic roles is assigned to a particular argument of the predicate and each argument be assigned a single semantic role. Yet, as the semantic interpretation indicates, the group denoted by the argument requires that the objects denoted participate both as agents and recipients or beneficiaries.

The reciprocal as a pronominal argument receives the semantic role of the recipient, effectively resolving the reading that the construction has both agent and beneficiary semantic roles.

Instrumental head-marked phrases direct attention to the object. It presents the notion by means "of". Naess (2008) states that an instrument is involved in two separate ways that are connected, instances of causation, the agent causing movement or change in the instrument and the instrument triggering an effect on the patient. It is thus the intermediate role that gives the instrumental phrases the properties of being causer and the patient at the same time, as demonstrated in the structure below;

o-mucheni ya-li-la e-sichuko
SM visitor SM PST-ate (INST) with a spoon.
'The visitor ate with a spoon'.

In the structure above, the head-marked phrase *li-la* (eat with) is head marked with a morpheme *–la* (with) showing (eat with) marking the instrumental of beneficiary to the subject *o-mucheni* (visitor).

Applicative constructions in Bantu languages like Lunyore can map a benefactive role on an applied phrase with virtually any verb root, as long as the lexical semantics of the root and context allow for the benefactive interpretation. In Lunyore, the applicative construction is obligatory to syntactically express a beneficiary as in the structure below;

A-bana basini-la o-mucheni
CLchildrenSMdance APPL for the visitor
'the children are dancing for the visitor'

The head-marked phrase *basini-la* (dancing for) has been head-marked with the morpheme *–la* (for) showing the beneficiary role to the visitor (omucheni).

Locatives in Lunyore like other Bantu languages can act as internal and external arguments of their predicates, as in the structure below;

o-mukhasi ya-ruma mutiyi mu-siro
1-woman SM-send worker LOC 17-market
'The woman sent the worker to the market'.

In the structure above, the locative NP *mu-siro* (in the market) has been head-marked with the morpheme *mu* (in the) which saturates the goal theta role of the verb *ruma* (sent). Trithart (1983) observe that the locative assignment of semantic role of goal can be distinguished to NP in combination to the verbs. Trichardt (ibid) observations can be noticed in the structure above.

Spencer (1991: 210) defines the passive as a morpho-syntactic operation that suppresses the external argument. The external argument may not be syntactically expressed but is available semantically. In other words, a verb is said to be in passive voice when

the subject always comes first and is seen to do something. But the roles are reversed, it is the object that takes the initial position and the subject may be mentioned or eliminated. The action of the passive sentence is more important than the doer of the action (subject); consider the structures below;

(a) Chi-ng'ombe chili-ye a-matuma
SM cow TNS SM eat-TNS SM maize
'The cows have eaten maize'
(b). A-matuma ka-li-ywe ne-ching'ombe
SM maize SM PASS eaten with p L SM-ng'ombe
'The maize has been eaten by the cows'

The derived structure in (b) is a personal passive with an agentive phrase *nende ching'ombe* (by the cows); an oblique role. The object/patient *amatuma* 'maize' of the basic sentence moves to the subject *ching'ombe* 'cows' and becomes the thematic subject in the derived sentence in (b). The fronted subject/theme *a-matuma* 'maize' is still affected by the action but it has been over emphasized hence the patient role is thematized. The head-marked phrase *ka-liywe* 'has been eaten' is passivized to license agreement with the prepositional phrase *ne-ching'ombe* 'with the cows'. Theta theory regulates the assignment of thematic roles onto phrases. The basic principle of theta theory is the theta criterion which holds at all levels of representation and establishes relative distribution of predicates and arguments. Chomsky (1981) posits that theta criterion states that; each argument bears only and only one theta role and each theta role is assigned to only one and only one argument and the analysis above confirms this.

Causatives can be defined as verbs which refer to a causative situation; that is to a causal relation between the two events, one of which is believed by the speaker to be caused by another speaker (Kastovsky, 1973), in other words, a causative is a verb or verbal construction meaning 'cause to'. In the theoretical analysis, the Lunyore causative is considered to mark semantic roles in the head-marked phrases as in the following structures;

(a). Papa yelusia a-bana
CL2 father SM-ran CAVS-FV CL 2 children
'Father made the children to run'
(b). O-mulalu ya-ris-i-a o-mwana
CL2 o-mulalu SM-fear CAUS-FV CL2 child
'The man made the child to fear'

Causative morpheme in Lunyore is (i) it marks the semantic role in head-phrase constructions as in the examples above. The causative morpheme (i) in (a) above, marks the semantic role of recipient to the phrase *abana* (children) who receive the recipient role. The head-marked phrases in (a) and (b) *yelusia* (chased away) and *yarisia* (made afraid) mark the semantic role of recipient respectively, which licenses agreement between the subject and the object respectively.

In theta theory, the required number of arguments as well as their semantics and verb's combinatory properties must be compatible with each other for the sentence to make sense, thus the theta role is a particular way of representing the semantic restrictions on an argument to a verb.

Thus the theta theory of Chomsky (1982) is obeyed in the sense that all arguments in the causative head-marked phrases like *yelusia* (chased away) in (a), *yarisia* (made afraid) in (b) above are assigned one theta role of experiencer each as a requirement of the theta criterion theory.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study found that the syntactic elements in Lunyore head-marked structure must be obligatory, agree for the correct grammar to be realized. The study also found out that for one to understand Lunyore syntax, one must be familiar with the morphological structure of the phrase.

It was also noted that, the applicative licenses a non-factor role (non-agentive). The applicative roles in Lunyore are beneficiary.

The study concludes that, there is a syntactic and semantic relations in head-marked phrases. The discussions above illustrate that semantic role-marking is a significant process that influences syntactic alignment and morphological realization. It is also xnoted that semantic components are related to cognitive and psychological factors of language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study was mainly on data from Lunyore. I recommend a more comparative approach with other languages either within the Bantu or from other language families.

The study adopted a morphosyntactic approach which focuses more of the head-marked structure. A study that will focus on language use is needed. There is need for studies to determine the full semantic scope, the discourse and pragmatic function of the affixes. The theoretical framework employed is mainly based on the generative framework. An analysis based on other theories may provide more information on the syntax of head-marking that have never been discussed before.

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