Introduction to Linguistics (CL1.102)

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Sense Relations – Sentences (contd.)

5. Tautology: X is semantically vacuous and carries no real information as it is invariably true. For example, *This bachelor has no wife.* Such sentences can be used in speech because of connotations; for instance, *Boys will be boys.*

6. Anomaly: X presupposes a contradiction. For example, *He chased his own widow out of the house.*

Structure of Sentences

Sentences and words are only morphosyntactic categories; this may not be an optimal categorisation for semantic study.

Semantic analysis is done using the following 3-tier system of units:

- predication: it roughly corresponds to a sentence, and has a truth/falsehood value.
- cluster: it roughly corresponds to a word or a phrase and is the upper limit of componential analysis. hypnonymy, incompatibility etc. apply to this level.
- features: the minimal differentiating factors of meaning (analogous to distinctive features in phonology).

Predications are analysed into clusters, which are in turn analysed into features. Clusters are either arguments or predicates; arguments are the logical participants and predicates are the linking elements. For example, in *My mother reads poetry.*, the arguments are *my mother* and *poetry*, and the predicate is *reads.*

A predication can have one argument or multiple.

The analysis of clusters into features is necessary in order to explain semantic relations like entailment. For example, consider *Adam boiled an egg. boiled* could be analysed as `cook` + `in water` + `past`; only then one can explain why it entails *Adam cooked an egg.*

An analysis similar to this shows the contradiction in *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.* However, for this, we need to have an understanding of the semantic relations between the various parts of the sentence. The Indian grammatical tradition has just such a system.

Consider the sentence *The girl in the forest was digging for roots with a spade yesterday.*

Here, the arguments are *the girl*, *the forest*, *roots*, *a spade* and *yesterday*.

What connects these five arguments is the action, indicated by the predicate *was digging*.

The arguments (*prakrti*), which are essentially participants in the action; their specific roles are *kārakas*. Further, the arguments combine with the action through a word that indicate their exact role (like *in*, *for* or *with*), called *pratyaya*.

In this sentence,

- *the girl*, the agent, has the *kāraka* K1
- *the forest*, the spatial location, has K7p
- *roots*, the patient, has K2
- *the spade*, the instrument, has K3
- *yesterday*, the temporal location, has K7t