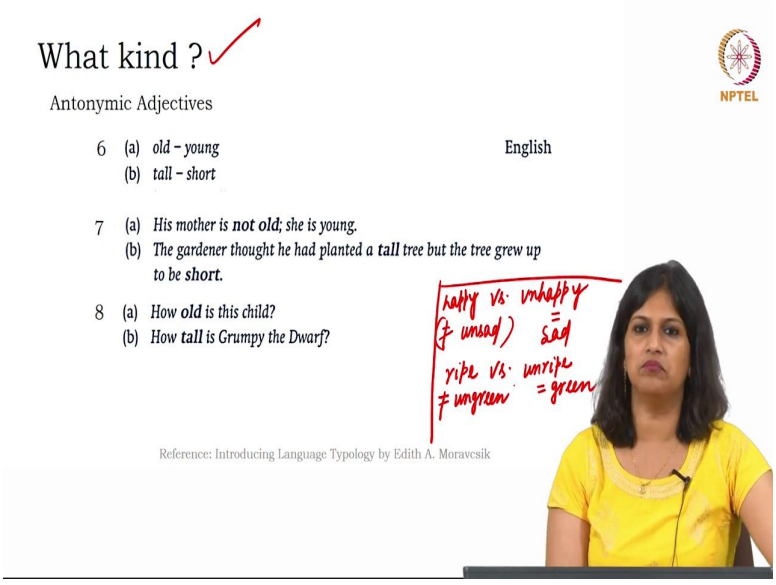
Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
Dr. Anindita Sahoo
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 19
Lexical Typology: Generalizations (Antonymic Adjectives)

So, how far have we been until now? You remember there were 6 different semantic domains; the semantic domain of body parts, kinship terms, pronouns, number system, antonymic adjectives and color terms. We are done with the first four, body parts, kinship terms, personal pronouns and numerals.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:41)



From the structure and existence of numerical system, we are moving to the adjectives. And when we are talking about the adjectives it is primarily what kind, what type or what feature, what sort of features we are going to discuss as far as the antonymic adjectives are concerned.

So, we are going to discuss this first. Let us have a look at it. So, now, where are we switching from? We are switching from quantity to quality, because when we were talking about number system, we are talking about quantity. Now, we are moving to the quality. So, in the forthcoming section, this part related to the adjectives and the next, which are the color terms, we are primarily going to focus on the quality. And why we are going to focus on

quality? First, we will talk about the adjectives that describe things. In this category my focus is going to be on antonymic adjectives, the adjectives which have which have their own antonyms.

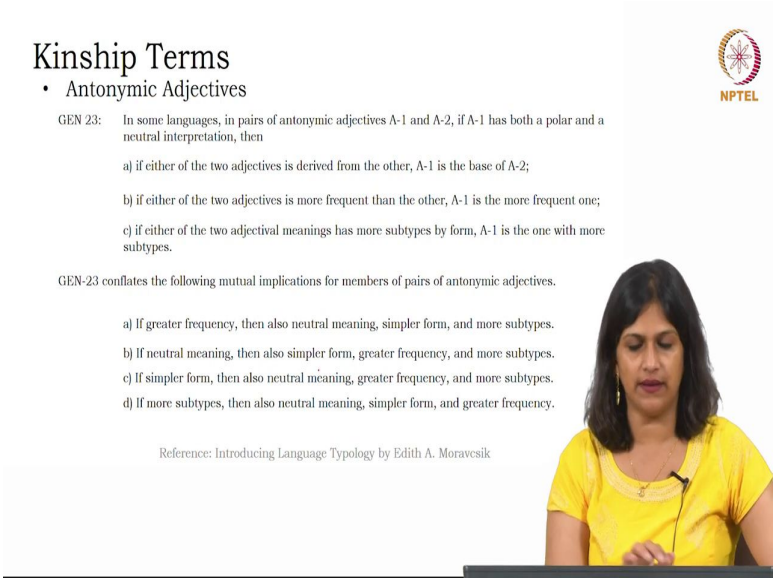
Let us say the example I have written here old versus young, tall versus short. His mother is not old, she is young. The gardener thought he had planted a tall tree, but the tree grew up to be short. And then how old is the child? How tall is Grumpy the Dwarf? So, these are old, young, tall, short. These exact adjectives have opposite meanings. Why we would call them opposite? Because a person cannot be both young and old. You would never find that he is old, but also he is young, not really.

A tree cannot be both tall and short, and a lake cannot be both deep and shallow for that matter, but I will primarily focus on old and tall. These are the two things that I am going to talk about. Do you think the lexical system works in this way? Is there any way by which you can think about an example where a particular tree can be tall as well as short? Can you think about it for a while? My suggestion for you would be read the examples on the slides 7, a and b. So, 7 a, what is written? Her mother is not old, she is young. In one sentence you have used both old and young. And b tall and short, the gardener thought he planted a tall tree. So, something which is tall for me, might be short for somebody else, but the tree grew up to be too shor.

These kind of adjectives can also be used in the questions. How old is the child? In this case, you are not really talking about the antonymization here, how tall is the grumpy dwarf. So, when you say how old is the child, ideally the child should be young; how can you say the child is old. Tthe default semantics of old means somebody who is not young. But when you say child, a child is young, young child. The child cannot be old in that sense. So, in this case, though we are using the term old, but it is actually used in the young sense.

Same is the case with how tall is Grumpy the dwarf. So, if somebody is dwarf, then obviously, he cannot be tall. But these are the constructions where you can have both the senses or both the semantic interpretations in one sentence. The word tall can be used for a dwarf, the word old can be used for a child. That is the reason why the antonymic adjectives are an interesting area to study further.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:08)



Let us look at the next set of generalizations that we have. How we are going to summarize whatever tiny bit of discussion we have had? In English, one member of each pair of antonymic adjectives may be used in both polar and neutral sense. So, when you say polar, it is limited, the semantic scope is limited, and if it is old, the polar sense of old would entail the polar sense of young. But in case of neutral, sometimes an old person or a young child might be asked in the context of age which is related to the word old.

Certain words which can be used both in polar and neutral sense and certain others which are either at the polar or at the neutral sense. So, maybe I will say happy and unhappy. When we say happy and unhappy, you cannot say happy means unsad, that is not possible. These are interesting examples for this polar-neutral thing; so, happy versus unhappy. Can you say happy is unsad? No, you cannot say. Unhappy is sad, but happy cannot be unsad.

Similarly, ripe versus unripe. If something is unripe, it could be green,, but if something is green, it cannot be ungreen. Keep that in mind. So, not all the adjectives will have the polar antonyms, some are neutral ones. If it is unhappy, that means sad, but happy cannot be unsad. Ripe versus unripe, these are the polar ones, but green cannot be ungreen. Keep that in mind. This is how in most of the cases, at least in English, things are going to work.

On this note, we will move to the generalizations that we can draw from these kind of examples. Before we move to the generalizations, let me just give you an idea. There is a common clustering of properties for members of some antonymic pairs in some language and these clusters follow the general pattern or markedness relation. So, my suggestion for you would be to look at the data, maybe I will write it over here.

So, my suggestion would be you go and check the book once. For German, the old versus young, for the old people there is a different word and for old things, there is a different word. Similar is the case with Danish; for the old people they have a different adjective, for the old things they have a different adjective. But this may not work for English; English has a uniform kind of an adjective. There are different languages in the world which have different systems as far as lexical typology is concerned.

Keeping these things in mind, so existence and morphological structure we will try to find out some generalizations that linguists have accounted for so far. Let us have a look at the 23rd generalization. What does it say? It says in some languages, in pairs of antonymic adjectives A1 and A2, if A1 has both a polar and neutral interpretation, then either of the two adjectives is derived from the other, A1 is the base of A2. It sounds a little long.

So, there is a precondition. What is the precondition? The precondition is that let us say a language x. This language has two kinds of adjectives A1, A2. A1 is the kind of adjective which has both polar and neutral interpretations. In such cases, A1 is the base and A2 is the derivation or something like A2 is the secondary form.

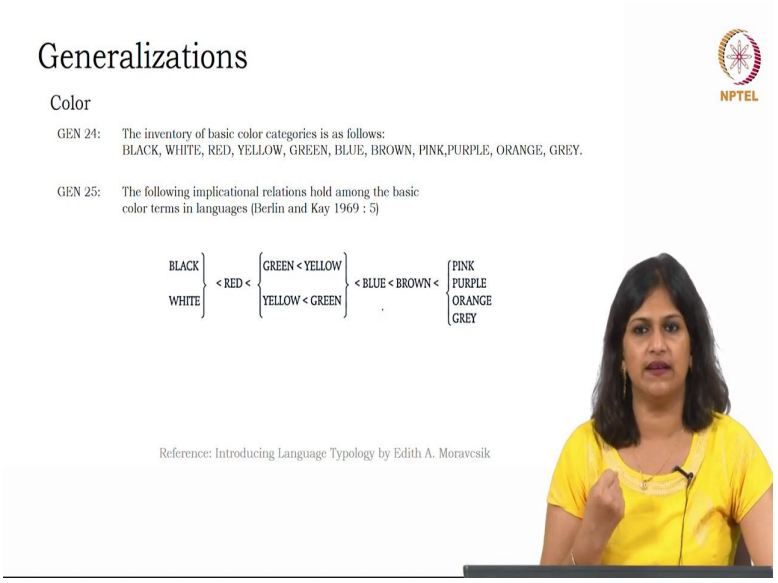
So, if we talk about the derivation, let us think about it, let us visualize the better picture. Let us say Odia is a language. I do not think this thing would fit in to Odia so easily, but let us think let us assume in my language Odia, I have two kinds of adjectives A1 and A2. Of these, A1 has both polar and neutral interpretations. In such cases, A1 is the base and A2 is the derived from. Which one is the base? A1. And which one is the derived from? A2. And what is the main feature of the base form? It has both the polar and the neutral interpretations. What does that second point say? If either of the two adjectives is more frequent than the other then A1 is more frequent.

Let us say A1 and A2 are two kinds of adjectives, A1 has both polar and neutral and A2 has only polar. So, in this case, the frequency of occurrence if we match, then A1 would be more frequent than A2. Then third, if either of the two adjectival meanings have more subtypes by form then A1 is the one which has more subtypes. So, it depends on the versatility of the adjective. A1 has both polar and neutral, A2 does not have neutral let us say it has only polar. So, in such a situation, A1 is the base form, A2 is derived; A1 is more frequent, A2 is less frequent; A1 has more subtypes and A2 has fewer number of subtypes. So, that is what generalization 23 would talk about.

And if you conflate it, if it sounds more clumsy then you can ignore it. But if we conflate let us say we put everything together. So, the 23rd generalization can be read in the following manner. And what is the following manner? If greater frequency then also neutral meaning, simple form, more subtypes. So, the frequency is more, meaning is neutral, form is simpler, subtypes are more. Neutral meaning, simpler form, greater frequency, more subtypes. If the form is simpler, meaning is neutral, frequency is greater and subtypes are more.

If there are more subtypes, then the meaning is neutral, form is simpler and frequency is greater. So that means, frequency, meaning, simple form and subtype, they are related to one another. One, if one is more the other one is also going to be more or better. But if in 23, the conflation sounds to be clumsy, then you can focus on only the generalization 23. So, what does this say? This says, this pattern of having a polar and a neutral form does occur in languages, but it does not provide the distribution of pattern.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:01)



When you are talking about the distribution, it may not be as evident as it shows in the generalization, not really. That could be the structural entities or the antonymic adjectives could be a little different. So, that was about the fifth semantic domain that we were talking about. Then the last, but not the least, that is, words for colors or the color words. There are two more generalizations left which are related to colors, but before that let me just give you an idea.

Colors, this is one of the most intriguing aspects of studying lexical typology. And what is the most intriguing aspect? The relation between the words and the objects, quantities, events; because you remember we started the discussion with for everything there is a word, that is the most ideal kind of vocabulary that any given language might have. But that it does not really work. There is nothing ideal as far as language is concerned.

So, you might have certain situations, certain experiences, certain emotions or certain body parts, certain kinship terms, which do not have words at all. But does that mean that these are imperfect? No, we are not going to call it imperfect vocabulary. All vocabulary, all languages are perfect in that sense, self-sufficient. But as far as the color terms are concerned, there is a huge mismatch.

So, if you recall I was talking with the anomatic words. There are certain words when you hear that, you can infer the meaning. But in case of color terms, it is not possible. Generally, when you say red, you cannot hear red; when you say yellow you cannot hear yellow, that is not going to be possible. But let us see how the vocabulary system becomes a little difficult as far as color terms are concerned.

The real word does provide separable entities. And what kind of separable entities? Related to kinship terms, pronouns, body parts all of them. So, good, bad, temperature, sound, texture, test, smell, these are the different domains where you can have words. And of these dimensions, one such dimension is color. And when you are thinking about color, the first thing that strikes your mind is a rainbow. It has stripes, but the boundaries are fuzzy.

When the violet color merges with indigo, there is a fuzzy color between these two. When the indigo merges with green, there is a fuzzy color between these two. But do you have a word for that? Not really. That is why something like as we discussed for the body parts and for the kinship terms, you cannot have an ideal vocabulary for all the colors in the world.

There are some basic colors, but besides that, there could be many other colors which are in the fuzzy domain, which cannot have exact words for them. Rainbow is the best example. When all the 7 colors, when the stripe occurs, when one color touches another, there would be millions or multiples of fuzzy colors in between which we do not have words for. So, that is why, the color system is one of the interesting domains for study as far as lexical topology is concerned.

What type of colors do you have? And this is mainly Berlin and Kay, they have worked extensively on this. It is a 1969 work. There are two generalizations associated with the color terms. What are they? The 24th generalization, it says the inventory of basic color categories is as follows. Most of the languages will have words for black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, pink, purple, orange and grey. These are the basic colors. But if you think about a color like magenta or a color like vermilion red or peach color, some people say peach color related to the fruits. There are colors like maroon. Maroon is not a base color, red is the base color. Some languages might have a word for maroon, some languages may not have it. So, this is not in the inventory of the basic color categories. So, that is why the listed ones are the

basic colors. So, that is the generalization 24. Almost all the languages in the world, again, I am saying most, I am not saying all, most languages in the world will have the inventory of basic color categories.

Then what does the next generalization which is the last one, what does it say? Look at the implication given over here. The following implicational relations hold among basic color terms in languages. If we look at the implication, if there is a language which has words for pink, purple, orange and grey, that will surely have a word for brown.

If there is a word for brown, it will surely have a word for blue, and if it has a word for blue, it will surely have a word for green, yellow. And if you have a word for green and yellow, it would surely have a word for red, and if you have a word for red, it will surely have a word for black and white. So, black, white are the most rudimentary colors in any given language. And it can get extended to pink, purple, orange and grey. So, that is how the color schema or the color lexical typology works in most of the languages.

With this, I ended all the 6 semantic domains that I started the discussion with. So, go back to my initial discussions in the previous session. When I was trying to approach lexical typology, my focus was to look at words as a whole unit. I am not going to break into multiple parts, then it will go to the morphological typology section which I have briefly touched during my discussion and more discussion on morphological typology would be followed in the next sections.

So, as far as the lexical psychology is concerned, we have studied 6 different domains. We did try to see how does lexical typology work when you discuss the semantics of body parts. Then we discussed kinship terms, then we moved to the personal pronouns, the fourth one was numeral system, the fifth one was antonymical adjectives and finally, we have the color terms. And when we went through this, we did draw in total 25 generalizations, and we did not draw it, basically the linguists have already worked on it, we kind of revisited.

My suggestion for you would be from all the kinds of generalizations that we have discussed so far, can you try them with your language or the languages that you know? Do you think

this is how your language also works? And then whether it would fit in the most category or the some category or in the all category.

So, with this information in the next session, I would move to the morphological typology. I end lexical typology here. Please go back to the book, read a bit more about it, find out what are other examples given to substantiate the claims which are based on the 25 generalizations that we have studied so far. Furthermore, I would focus on the subparts or the subunits of word in the section of morphological typology.

Thank you. We ended the discussions related to lexical typology. See you soon.

Thank you.