Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 44
Semantic Typology-Part 1

Hello everyone, welcome to this session of our NPTEL course Appreciating linguistics: A typological approach.

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We have been talking about various domains of linguistics and how we are going to approach it from a typological perspective. One thing that we have learnt by far, there are certain crosslinguistic generalizations in the subdisciplines of linguistics.

Starting from lexical typology, morphological typology, phonological typology, and syntactic typology, we have seen so far there are a couple of generalizations that we can draw from various languages spoken in the world. Typology could be approached from two different perspectives, from the formal as well as from the functional perspective.

The functionalists try to figure out as many universals as possible taking into account a huge sample size. And, when I say sample size, I am talking about considering linguistic data or empirical data from multiple languages of the world.

And, as far as formal typology is concerned, the set of languages or the number of language samples becomes restricted, rather a lot of focus is given or is a lot of focus is on the theory underlying structure, or you can say the abstract similarity that the languages might have. In this case the formalists focus a lot on the child language acquisition. It can be studied from both the diachronic perspective as well as from the development perspective.

With this information about typological approach of the understanding of linguistics, today's discussion is going to be centered around semantic typology. We have discussed how the crosslinguistic generalizations can be drawn at the word level, morpheme level; when you say morphological typology, word level when you say lexical typology, sound level, that is going to be phonetic typology or phonological typology. Then, we have sentence level that deals with or that talks about syntactic typology, besides that, we also have semantic and pragmatic typology.

This area of typological discussion is not going to be as varied as other fields but I want you to understand that how linguists try to approach semantics from a typological point of view. Here we are not going to focus on generalizations, we are not going to talk about GEN1, GEN2, GEN3 as we were doing in the previous slides.

Considering this is a little more abstract in nature, we will find out what is the pattern that one might have or what are the different ways by which semantic changes are happening and what are the basic questions that deal with semantic typology and maybe what are the the challenges that the area is facing and how it can contribute to the understanding of linguistics as a discipline.

Let us start the discussion with the introduction. The first thing that I want you to remember is that semantic typology is a part of the broader term. What is the broader term? That is linguistic typology. It is a part of the linguistic typology that is concerned with the expression of meaning in language and languages.

When I say language and languages, if you remember my introduction video or the introduction lecture that we had, it was about big L and small l. Big L refers to natural language, as a whole and small l refers to individual languages just to reiterate what we have been talking about language and linguistics, individual language.

So, you can have L1, L2, L3, L4, L5 etcetera. When you are talking about big L, which is natural language and small l, which is the individual language, the idea that we have here is that a branch of linguistic typology or a part of linguistic typology, deals with semantics, it is concerned with the expression of meaning in language and languages.

That means, we are not just targeting individual languages, but we are also targeting the bigger language as a whole, that is why it is considered as a systematic crosslinguistic study of how languages express meaning by way of signs. This term is very important.

When I say signifier and signified relation, I will just give you a brief idea, but I would expect you to understand that when I say semantic typology. I am primarily concerned with the meaning aspect, how languages express meaning using the way of symbols and signs.

Just like all branches of linguistics, this particular discipline or this particular domain is also concerned with the deep regularities, which underlie the incredible diversity in how particular languages work. This statement sounds so heavy but if you try to analyze, if you try to understand, it is actually very simple.

Look at the 3 points written on the slides; the first thing is that this is a part of linguistic typology that is concerned with the expression of meaning in language and languages. Second thing, much like other disciplines of linguistics, this is also a crosslinguistic study, and this crosslinguistic study deals with how languages express meaning by the way of signs.

Through semantic typology we try to explore the deep regularities in the incredible diversity in how particular languages work. The languages of the world are extremely diverse. Each language functions in a certain way, each language functions in a distinct way.

In spite of all the diversities of the languages in the world, there is an underlying deep regular pattern as far as meanings are concerned. This meaning gets expressed by way of signs. That is what is the chief aim or that is what is the objective of semantic typology.

Semantic typology should target the regular pattern or the crosslinguistic pattern that involves the regularities in spite of all the diversified linguistic systems that we have. So, these are the three very important things that you need to remember when you are talking about semantic typology.

Now, let us see how diverse it is. When I say signs, I am talking about linguistic signs. Tentatively the world has on an average 6,000 languages. If the world has 6,000 languages that represent the outcome of a huge number of natural experiments, that involves different kinds of linguistic categories.

Each language will have a certain linguistic category and there are some other linguistic categories which are common across the languages. So, putting everything together, if you try to find out the number or a numerical indication of this study semantic typology, then it is

going to be inumerable, it is going to be huge, it is going to be vast. These sets of signs available in the world's 6,000 languages are humongous as far as the number is concerned.

In that we have to find out what sort of crosslinguistic generalization one might have as far as semantic typology is concerned. So, we realize that there are different languages in the world and each of these 6,000 languages that we have at our disposal is going to have many many linguistic items or many many linguistic sets.

Now there is a debate, and what sort of debate does semantic typology consider or semantic typology take up? The debate is that what is universal and what is culturally malleable that semantic typology has to look for. That means, there are certain things even in the semantics domain, which is going to be considered as universal.

How should we account for these universals, and the second thing is as far as these universals are concerned, how culturally that is going to be distinct. The different cultures might have different contexts, and the meaning might change depending on the cultural context where the language, this particular linguistic unit is being used. So, in spite of all these varied cultural and linguistic contexts, there must be some kind of universal feature or there must be some kind of commonality that the topologists should try to find out.

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With this discussion, let us see what should we expect when I say let us try to understand linguistic or semantic typology. So, what is the central question? This particular slide would give you an idea what should be the central question of semantic typology which is related to meaning.

The central question that is a part of semantic typology is that, what is that subsystem which expresses what kind of meaning? That means, there are many subsystems, and what are the subsystems? There are 3 primary subsystems; one is your lexical subsystem, grammatical subsystem, and prosodic subsystem. All the 3 subsystems would talk about certain kind of signs.

At the lexical level, you have lexical signs, grammatical signs, prosodic signs. These three domains or these three signs are considered to be the most fundamental units of semantic typology; remember, this is very important. If I ask you the question, what is the most fundamental unit of semantic typology, the answer should be these are the 3 fundamental units of any given phrase or word or sentence or paragraph, you must find out how many lexical units are there. Each lexical unit might have been comprising of some grammatical units and then obviously, you should be able to find out what is the prosodic unit.

So, as far as the most fundamental unit is concerned, which is sign, it will have three different; domains: lexical domain, grammatical domain and prosodic domain. So, keeping that in mind all the three basic domains that we have, now the question is which subsystem among these three expresses what sort of meaning.

If you think about Sapir's discussion on language, there is an increasing emphasis on developing an ontological inventory of meanings, and once you develop that ontological inventory of meaning, you have to link it to certain computationally implemented descriptive standards.

When I say descriptive standard; that means, you should be able to identify, you should be able to describe a particular grammatical unit and you should put it in a typological fashion. That means, there must be all the signs that we are talking about the lexical, grammatical, and

prosodic signs in semantic morphology. It must in fact go through certain kinds of crosslinguistic pattern or the crosslinguistic referent.

So, we will see how strongly we can claim that, because semantic typology is the most abstract domain of typological research. A lot of people who are involved in semantic typology do not consider themselves topologists.

So, that is a tricky situation or that is a tricky question when you are trying to figure out or when you are trying to understand if semantic typology is really a part of empirical typological research. Maybe gradually when you read more about it you will realize that this kind of typology is different from how we have studied syntactic, phonological, morphological, and lexical typology.

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Mechanisms of semantic change

• Metaphor and Metonymy
• "There are only two main ways of going about that: using words for the near neighbours of the things you mean (metonymy) or using words for the look-alikes (resemblars) of what you mean (metaphor)" (Nerlich and Clarke 1992: 137)
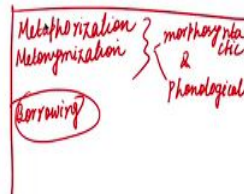
If you look at this slide, primarily the 3 subdomains of signs: lexical grammatical prosodic, then you have which subsystem expresses which sort of meaning and what happens in the actual use, what happens in the actual discourse?

In the actual discourse the speaker and the hearer try to find out information on their pragmatic knowledge, which enriches the signs. So, what is meant is more than what is said. That was some introduction about semantics typology; what is the primary question, what are

the subdomains and what are the different ways by which the typologists have been working so far.

Let us take up the issue of semantic typology from these introductory concepts. Now, we just realized that the linguistic signs are the most rudimentary or the most fundamental units of semantic typology, and this can be studied in three different domains, we can study it as linguistic signs, grammatical signs and prosodic signs.

With these three different domains of signs in semantics, we must try to figure out the answer of the most conceptual question, which subsystem expresses which sort of meaning. Lexical subsystem what kind of meaning does it express, grammatical subsystem, what kind of meaning does it express and prosodic subsystem what kind of meaning does it express, but I will just give you a comprehensive answer and I will give you a summarized or the totalitarian answer.

The comprehensive answer is that keeping all the 3 subdomains in mind, when in actual use like when the language is used in the discourse or when it is used for communication or for some other purpose, in the actual use, what happens the speaker and the hearer try to draw on their pragmatic knowledge.

This pragmatic knowledge might include lexical information, grammatical information, and prosodic information. So, considering the hearers draw on their pragmatic knowledge that helps both the speaker and the listener to enrich the sign, and what sign? These three signs, lexical, grammatical, prosodic signs.

As a result, this is the statement that happens which sounds to be a little complicated. Because of this pragmatic knowledge in all the three domains of signs, lexical, grammatical, and prosodic, the speaker and the hearer they are involved in a process where what is meant is more than what is said; that means, when you say something there could be some additional source of information gathered from your speech.

The lexical information or the grammatical information that you have in your speech, that is not enough prosody, and other kinds of pragmatic tools or other kind of pragmatic components, also help the speaker and the hearer to make the communication process

complete, which is why while studying semantic typology, we can say that the linguistic signs, can be understood in a sense that what is meant is more than what is said.

That is not the only thing that the hearer is getting. The hearer might have some additional or some extra information, because of the pragmatic knowledge that they have. So, this is how we are trying to understand meaning in the context of semantic typology. So now, since I am going to talk about semantic typology, primarily I am going to talk about the changes.

What sort of semantic changes happen or what kind of semantic changes do we encounter as the speech community or as a human being who uses language and what are the different mechanisms of such semantic changes? If you remember, when I was talking about lexical typology and morphological typology, I did talk about how the new words get introduced in the lexicon of a language. How the old words get deleted from the lexicon of language and sometimes even though existing words they change their meaning.

This semantic change has multiple mechanisms. So, for today's session or for this particular course my focus is going to be on two primary or two very important mechanisms of semantic change. And, this semantic change is going to be the part of the typological semantic typological study that we are trying to discuss.

So, what are the two mechanisms? You have a metaphor and we and you have metonymy. All of you have heard about metaphor and metonymy. Metaphorization and metonymization are the two major mechanisms of change, which are usually recognized in morphological as well as phonological change. Remember this, this is what I want you to understand. One is metaphorization, the second is metonymization.

These are the two major mechanisms in fact, as far as semantic change is concerned and they are realized in morphosyntactic and phonological change. When you are talking about the reanalysis and analogy that is given in case of semantic change, the two primary ones are these, but besides metaphorization and metonymization, we also have a third mechanism that is borrowing.

This is also another major mechanism, which includes semantic change. I am not going to talk about borrowing here, because I have already discussed it in the morphological typology

section, when I did talk about direct and indirect borrowing from different languages in the unit of neologism. Please go back and check those videos or slides, but for this particular session, my focus is going to be on metaphorization and metonymization.

Whatever I have discussed by now about semantic typology, you should be able to understand that there is a lot of overlapping information related to lexical, morphological, and semantic typology. Now let us focus on the first two mechanisms that I just said. Nerlich and Clarke(1992) would say that there are only two ways or two main ways of going about that, and what are the two main ways? I have already written it over here, metonymization and metaphorization.

What kind of a phenomenon is that? As far as semantic change is concerned, what exactly happens? Here the speakers or the speech community speakers or the language speakers use words for the near neighbors of the things that you mean, the near neighbors.

Let us say when you say bank, bank could be some other things also. Bank could be a store, bank could be an office, bank could be riverbank. In this case when you are thinking about metonymy or metonymization, it is going to be some sort of related meaning, using words for the near neighbors of the things that you mean. So, that is metonym.

Otherwise you can also have words for the lookalikes. These lookalikes are known as resemblars. So, in case of resemblars, you are primarily focusing on a thing of what you mean. What you mean is going to be in the metaphor category and finding out the neighboring words of what you mean is going to be in the metonymization category.

So, one is near neighbor, the other one is lookalike. Near neighbor would be in metonymy category and lookalikes are going to be in the metaphor category. I am going to briefly discuss these two issues in a few minutes.