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The following paper, in a slightly different version, was read at the 1953 Pacific Science Congress in Manila. It is to be printed in the Proceedings of the Congress, but because of the usual delays in such printing, it is being mimeographed again in the 1957 Silgraf Work Papers Volume, for reference purposes.

CLASS AND CONSTRUCTION MARKERS

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Since the days of Bloomfield, American linguists have operated largely on the assumption of a single minimal structural unit for descriptive grammar --the morpheme, and a single term for the structural arrangement of morphemes --distribution. Because of the fact that they must consistently occupy four very different places in any given description, we would like to suggest that consistent distinction be maintained between central and lateral morphemes, and that two different distributional devices be distinguished: class markers and construction markers. The first two are, in Hjelmslev's terminology, terminals or functives. The second two are functions, relations, connections between terminals.

The best-known, though by no means the only, varieties of central and lateral morphemes are word bases and affixes. The central/lateral distinction, having been already discussed,¹ will be given no further attention here, except to allege that it is a distinction which must be maintained throughout any given grammatical description. One often hears mention made, for example, of 'morpheme inventories'. Unless it is specified that these are inventories

1 Nuclear Structures in Linguistics, Lang. 24.287-292 (1948).

of either central or lateral morphemes, however, they turn out only to be lexicons. Much needless misunderstanding, furthermore, has arisen between various European and American linguists with regard to the definition of the term 'morpheme' because some use it in a purely lateral sense, whereas others use it to mean both lateral and central.²

Class and construction markers, although minimal, like morphemes, differ from the latter in that their presence in a given utterance is governed by grammatical (i.e., structural) rather than lexical considerations. They are often subsumed by such terms as 'particle' and 'empty morph'. While they may consist of phonological material, like morphemes, in which case Hockett's term 'morph' may appropriately be applied, they may also be indicated by such non-segmental phenomena as position and intonation contours.

The Philippine languages provide some exceptionally lucid illustrations of overt, or morpheme-like class and construction markers. The Tagalog article ang, and the Ilocano article ti, for instance, are much better examples than the English article the, of almost 'pure' class markers, i.e., with almost no morphemic status at all. The English article the, since it may contrast with the indefinite article a has a complex morpheme and class marker status. Ang and ti, however, serve almost no lexical (i.e., meaningfully contrastive) function. Their chief characteristic is obligatory occurrence with certain sequences in order to mark those sequences as being substantival in nature.

In this connection it is to be noted that such terms as 'noun' and 'verb' are essentially structural rather than lexical designations, that is, a given sequence, in a given language, is not intrinsically a noun or verb,

² See, for example, Hjelmslev's usage: "Throughout this book the term morphemes is restricted to use in the sense of inflexional elements, considered as elements of the content." Prolegomena to a Theory of Language, (Baltimore, 1935) pg. 15.

but becomes either one or the other according to the function which it sustains with other sequences in a given utterance. This observation is especially relevant here since some of the Philippine languages have often been cited as classic examples of languages which lack a basic noun/verb distinction. The reason for this, of course, is that there is little or no indication in the morphology of some of these languages to distinguish nouns from verbs. We consider, however, that absence of morphological marking is insufficient grounds for alleging absence of noun/verb distinction, unless, of course, these terms be defined by morphological criteria exclusively. The invariable presence of a syntactic class marker such as ang or a demonstrative serves the very same function as morphological markers in other languages. In Nahuatl, for example, nearly all nouns are morphologically marked by a suffix, a common form of which is -tli. Scholars have therefore affirmed that Nahuatl has nouns, Tagalog has none. But the Tagalog syntactic article ang stands in the same functional relationship as the Nahuatl morphological suffix -tli. There is, therefore, no adequate reason for stating that one of these languages has nouns, the other has none. Of course it is granted that the noun/verb contrast might not appear in a dictionary of a language like Tagalog, but since this contrast is grammatical rather than lexical anyway, that limitation does not seriously alter the picture.

A class marker differs from a lateral morpheme, which it most resembles, in that the former usually occurs with only one kind of class and has no meaning other than that of the class which it marks, whereas the latter may occur with several kinds of classes and has a lexical meaning in addition to any class meaning it may have. (A lexical meaning is one which may be defined by a non-linguistic referent, whereas a class meaning cannot be defined except

in terms of the structure of the language involved.³ Thus, the Tagalog article ang occurs only as substantive marker, and its meaning cannot be defined except in terms of the structure of Tagalog, whereas the English suffix morpheme -s 'plural', for example, can be defined or illustrated by numerous non-linguistic parallels.)

Derivational affixes usually serve as class markers.

A construction marker differs from a lateral morpheme in that it has no lexical meaning, and from both a lateral morpheme and a class marker in that the only constructions into which it enters are those involving a sequence of two classes. The term 'ligature', frequently encountered in Philippine linguistics, is an excellent one for morphs which serve as construction markers. Hjelmslev and Uldall's terms 'relation', 'function', and 'connection' fit also in some contexts. I have also used the term 'valence'.⁴ Whatever term is used, it must be remembered that the unit may be either overt or covert, that is, either morph-like in its appearance or else consisting of positional or prosodic phenomena. Examples of overt construction markers are Tagalog ay in the sentence Ang bapor ay nagdaan sa tubig 'The ship sailed on water', and Tagalog na in the sentence Ang bayad na ito ay mahal 'The payment na this ay dear.' (This payment is dear.)

Spanish infinitive suffix -r in the sentence Quiere trabajar 'He wants to work' probably serves the complex function of both ligature and class marker. Notice that in this case the ligature follows the second part of the construction instead of occurring between the two parts which it unites. Another

3 William Moulton contrasts "pure" lexical and structural devices by the suggestion that the lexical have some referent "outside of the code", whereas the purely structural is entirely "inside the code".

4 A Grammar of Tetelcingo (Morelos) Nahuatl, (Baltimore, 1954) pg. 6.

complex class and construction marker is the English genitive suffix -s, which marks a noun class and a relation between two nouns. Note that there is a sense in which all class markers which mark subordinate classes may be said to mark also the relation between such a class and a non-subordinate class with which it occurs in construction. Thus, all adjective class markers may be said to mark some construction such as a noun-adjective construction. This common portmanteau characteristic, however, is not sufficient grounds for alleging that class and construction markers should not be identified as separate devices. Thus, all devices which mark a subject or object construction also mark a substantive (noun or pronoun), but not all devices which mark a substantive mark a construction into which it enters. Compare the English object marker, pronoun suffix -m as in whom with the English article the.

A morpheme may lose its morphemic status in certain constructions and serve only as a construction marker. Examples of this are English do in the sentence I do not know, Nahuatl preterit morpheme -x in the sentence Tli t-a-x-tika 'What you-do-ligature-durative', English to in the sentence I want to go.

The English subject-verb construction is usually marked by a pre-verb position. The object-verb construction is marked by post-verb position, and, in the case of the pronouns him, them, and whom, by post-verb position and the suffix -m. This suffix is therefore an overt ligature rather than a morpheme, and the positions are covert ligatures.

Still another type of ligature (construction marker) is the rising (2-3) intonation contour marking a series in English, as in the phrase apples,²⁻³ oranges,²⁻³ mangos,²⁻³ and bananas.²⁻³⁻¹