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A limited application of linguistic methods and concepts to ethnography, y datos sobre el parentesco

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A Limited application of linguistic methods and concepts to ethnography

Three types of fishing situations have been observed among the Cashibo tribe of Indians in South America:

- A. Balls of mashed-leaf pulp of a certain toxic plant are inundated in a partially dammed stream. The fish, frenzied by the effects of the plant juices, dart about, often leaping clear of the water. They are prevented from escaping downriver by the dam, and are targets in plain view for the fishermen -- men, women and older children -- as they dash about in the water, wielding machetes or sticks to strike down and throw to shore as many fish as they can before the effects of the juice wear off. Often large numbers of fish are caught, varying in size from 6 to 14 inches.
- B. After a rain, when the water is turbid, a man skilled with bow and arrow rides down the stream in a small canoe, standing erect in the prow, with bow and harpoon-arrow poised ready to shoot as soon as a victim is spotted and the canoe can be guided to a good shooting position. His assistant in the bow of the canoe watches every movement of fish and fisherman, guiding the canoe accordingly. Usually one to three fish are caught, which often measure two or more feet in langth.
- C. The women feel under the rocks with their hands, in shallow rivers where a certain kind of fish customarily hide. The fish caught are usually small, and many in number.

Just as a stretch of speech can be described as to duality of structural matter, being conceived of at the levels of phonology

and grammar, so each of the fishing situations could be described as to the way it fits into the different levels of structure of non-linguistic behavior: economic, social, ideational. However, without first considering the part each event plays in each of the three cultural levels, a tentative beginning in analysis can be made by using concepts parallel to those used in linguistics, considering that each of the three types of fishing activity has its distinctivecontrastive features which distinguish it from the other types. It is known that the three fishing events occur in different types of environments, are carried out by different groups of people, and involve different types of fish; they are obviously not the "same", nor directly substitutable for each other. The identificationalcontrastive features involve: (i) distinctive equipment, distinctive place, (iii) distinctive participants, (iv) distinctive type and quantity of fish, and no doubt other distinctive-contrastive features as well. For A, the distinctive-contrastive features are: (i) poison plant pulp, machetes, sticks, (ii) clear stream partly dammed (iii) men, women and older children, (iv) usually many, medium-sized fish. For B, they are: (i) bow and harpoon-arrow, (iii) man and assistant (who may be a (ii) turbid river, woman), (iv) few, large fish. For C, the distinctive-contrastive (i) hands only, (ii) clear, shallow stream with features are: rocky bed, (iii) women, usually in a group, (iv) usually many, small fish, of such kinds as "lipu" and "libapa".

Each type of activity, A, B, C, will have variant forms, e.g., the actual place of fishing will vary; the pulp balls will vary in

^{*}Or. Pike, however, postulates a third level, so that his categories are: phonological (with the phoneme as minimal unit), lexical (with the morpheme as minimal unit), and grammatical (with the tagmeme, a slot-class correlation unit, as the minimal unit).

size; the river in Unit B will be more swollen and turbid at some times than at others; the participants in Unit Aswill vary greatly from time to time, and so on. The differences, however, are not sufficient to cause one to question the identity of each event as belonging to type A, B, or C of fishing. The different manifestations of the event parallel allounits in a language system. "Some of the variations will be "free variations" in the sense that alternative choices could have been made, with no conditioning of environment. On the other hand, just as allophones might occur as deviants conditioned by the environment, or allomorphs as conditioned phonologically or morphologically by their environment, so the deviant manifestations of the fishing event may be caused by the environment. E.g. if there is a scarcity of plant leaves, the balls will probably be smaller; if the river has flooded, and then subsided, leaving ponds of water on low-lying islands, in which fish may have been trapped, the type of damming is natural, rather than man-made. In any case, the whole pattern of the unit has not been disrupted beyond recognition and identification. case of conditioned variation.

The three fishing units we have postulated can now be fitted into the non-linguistic levels mentioned earlier. In the economic structure of the culture, considering these units in a larger matrix, they might be grouped together as a class of units, whose general meaning is "source of fish meat-supply". In the social structure, each unit, A, B, C, would belong to a different class of units. Unit

Edward Sapir, in Sound Patterns in Language (RIL, page 21), explains this misely for the phonological level: "In most languages, what is felt by the speakers to be the 'same' sound has perceptibly different forms" according to "the phonetic conditions in which the fundamental sound ('point of the pattern') occurs". "...the objective difference is felt to be slight precisely because it corresponds to nothing significant in the inner structure of the phonetic pattern."

A would be linked with family or neighborhood social interaction,
Unit B applies to the role of the man in the family, Unic C applies
to groups of women. In the ideational structure, it is possible that
the three units might be grouped together again, as a subgrouping in
a larger class of items which give satisfaction in utilitarian accomplishment. The postulation of the units themselves would now seem to
be fully justified, as structural units within the larger structures
of the non-linguistic culture.

To continue the parallel with language, the fishing units themselves (parallel to a grammar unit consisting of more than one morpheme, or a phonological unit such as stress group or syllable, consisting of more than one phoneme) will have units comprising them.

Each unit will have an internal structure comrised of smaller units.

Within Unit A, one of the units would be the preparation of the pulp.

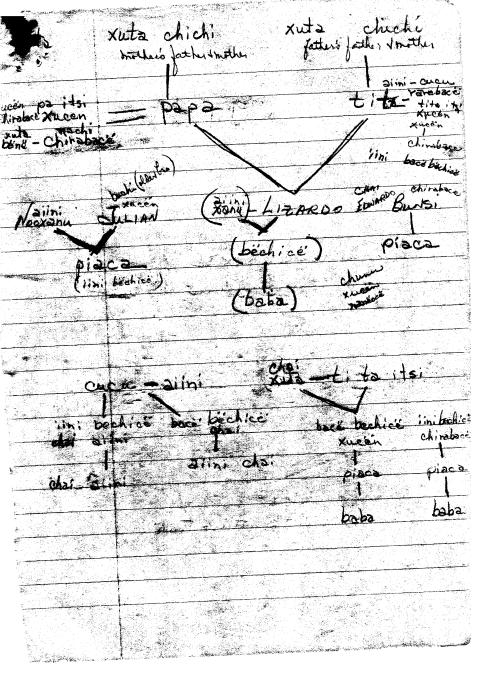
It is prepared by women; the leaves may be ground by a stone on a flat board, or put into a hole in the ground and pounded by a heavy verticel pole, and so on. Travel to the fishing scene and erecting the dam would be further units in Unit A. Each of these smaller units has its distinctive-contrastive features, variant forms, and its external and internal distribution.

Tr. Pike, in Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior, suggests a treatment of non-linguistic behavior parallel to that of grammar. In chapter 17, Part III, he suggests that human participants and their groupings darallel the phonological hierarchy. In Part I he describes a breakfast scene and a thurch service as behavioral events in a manner paralleling his treatment of lexical units, and their filling of specific slots. According to his theory, each unit on any level of any hierarchy (here I have used 'level' in a different sense from that in which it is used in the rest of the paper; hierarchies for language, according to Dr. Pike, are phonological, lexical and grammatical) can be described according to its feature mode, its manifestation/mode and its distribution mode. I have used these concepts in the paper. In the feature mode, Dr. Pike would include meaning as one of the distinctive contrastive features. E.g., for Unit A, he possibly would include food-gathering and neighborhood cooperation as meanings.

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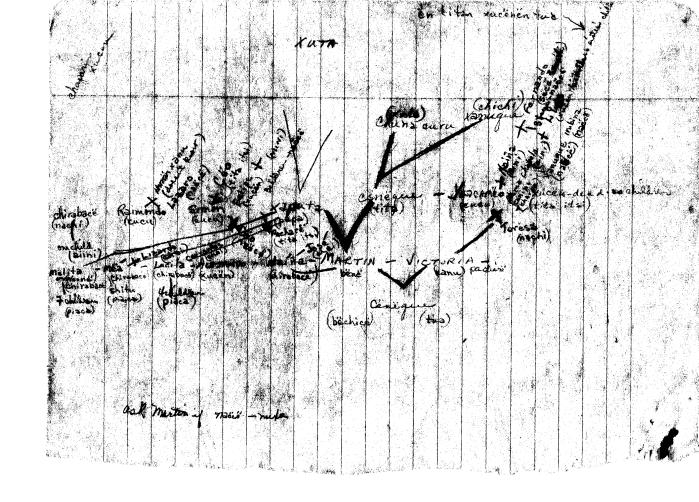
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