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SEMANTIC COMPONENTS OF PRONOUN SYSTEMS: SUBANON¹ AND SAMOAN

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The world in which men live and the linguistic system through which they communicate come together in the field of semantics. One of the difficulties in acquiring a second language or in translation is inadequate comprehension of the range of meaning represented by a given form in the second language. It is not news that this difficulty probably will not be solved by asking the informant, "...but, what does this really mean?"

On the assumption that language is systematic, one can look for subsystems within a language to help him understand a form which is a member of some subsystem. Using Pike's matrix permutation² as a tool, this paper purposes to demonstrate its usefulness in discovering the semantic components of two Austronesian pronoun systems.

The familiar matrix into which the Austronesian pronoun systems are placed contains the oppositions of first:second:third person(s); singular:dual:plural; and exclusive:inclusive (of first person plural). Taking one of the four³ sets of Subanon personal pronouns as illustrative, the following paradigm is indicated:

| | sing. | dual | plural | |
|--------|-------------|------|-------------|-----------|
| first | <u>akon</u> | | ami | exclusive |
| | | | <u>ita</u> | inclusive |
| second | <u>ika</u> | | <u>amu</u> | |
| third | <u>yen</u> | | <u>ilan</u> | |

and for Samoan:

| | sing. | dual | plural | |
|--------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|
| first | a'u | ma'ua | matou | exclusive |
| | | ta'ua | tatou | inclusive |
| second | 'oe | oulua | outou | |
| third | ia | la'ua | latou | |

One permutation provides certain clues to the semantic components of these systems which are not evident above. This is accomplished by exchanging first and second persons in the matrices. To facilitate comparison of the

two systems dual and plural categories will be dropped for the moment along with the dual and plural morphemes (-'ua, -lua and -tou) of Samoan.

| | sing. | non-sing. | |
|-----|-------|-----------|------|
| 2nd | ika | amu | |
| 1st | akon | ita | inc. |
| | | ami | exc. |
| 3rd | yen | ilan | |

SUBANON⁴

| | sing. | non-sing. | |
|-----|-------|-----------|------|
| 2nd | 'oe | ou- | |
| 1st | a'u | ta- | inc. |
| | | ma- | exc. |
| 3rd | ia | la- | |

SAMOAN

It should be noted that as ita and ta contain the component of second person (i.e. inclusive), so ami and ma may contain the component of third person. Also it appears that akon and a'u have no non-singular counterparts. By changing the labels as suggested by Thomas, McKaughan, and Conklin, by adding another category (called unnumbered for Subanon and dual for Samoan), and by rotating the axes the following matrices result:⁵

| | H | H+S | S | S+O | O | | H | H+S | S | S+O | O |
|------------|-----|-----|------|-----|------|------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| plural | amu | | | | ilan | | outou | tatou | | matou | latou |
| singular | ika | | akon | | yen | | 'oe | | a'u | | ia |
| unnumbered | | ita | | ami | | dual | oulua | ta'ua | | ma'ua | la'ua |

To the labels, Speaker and Hearer used by the above mentioned authors is added Other, present or absent from the scene of the conversation, but in any case, not a participant.

The final permutation presents the relevant⁶ oppositions for Subanon and Samoan pronouns in a manner which does not force plurality on the Subanon forms ita and ami, whose conversational relevance is inclusion vs. exclusion of the hearer. It indicates for both languages that there is no first person plural.

In conclusion it is suggested that as components of a pronominal form, first person and plural probably do not combine in many languages. Their combination would indicate more than one speaker. In reality what is indicated by such a form is a group of which the speaker is a member. In this group there will be another or others one or more of whom may be the hearer(s).

FOOTNOTES

¹Subanon of Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines. Material was gathered under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics from 1958-1960.

²Kenneth L. Pike, "Matrix permutation and conflation". To be published.

³The corresponding members of the four sets contain the same semantic components. They differ in grammatical function.

⁴Attempts at segmentation have proved fruitless for Subanon. Semantically these forms are portmanteau.

⁵Dave Thomas, "Three analyses of the Ilocano pronoun system". Word. Vol. 11.204-208 (August, 1955).

Howard P. McKaughan, "Semantic components of pronoun systems: Maranao". Word. Vol. 15.101-102 (April, 1959).

Harold G. Conklin, "Lexicographical treatment of folk taxonomies". IJAL Vol. 28, Part 4.119-141 (April, 1962).

⁶In both Subanon and Samoan plural the S+H forms may include O also but its inclusion is not of primary relevance so far as oppositions are concerned.