Morphological manifestations of hunter-gatherer lifestyle: Word formations and ethno-semantics in Philippine Negrito languages

Yukinori Kimoto
University of Hyogo, Japan
yk.kimoto@gmail.com

A number of studies have recognized the importance of cultural factors in explaining linguistic phenomena (Hale 1966; Wierzbicka 1979; Enfield 2002; Evans 2003), but their application to a wide area of morphosyntactic phenomena is still limited. To further explore relations between language and culture, this study analyzes denominal verbs in Philippine languages of Negrito (Austronesian) hunter-gatherer people. Among word formation strategies, denominal verbs are in fact the locus of a rich resource of cultural knowledge. For instance, in the Arta language of Philippine Negrito, *mam-laman* (INTR-wild.pig) from *laman* 'wild pig' means 'hunt for wild pigs.' This would not be understood without knowing that wild pigs are a primary hunters' prey.

To attest the possible connection between culture and the interpretation of denominal verbs, I collected data based on my own fieldwork and a literature survey of Arta, Casiguran Agta, Palanan Agta, Dupaningan Agta, and Central Cagayan Agta (e.g. Healey 1960; Headland & Headland 1974). Then semantic frames that stem nouns employ to derive verbs are examined, e.g., animal nouns framed as 'hunt for X' to derive intransitive verbs. Finally, the relationship between the framing patterns and the cultural domains is examined with reference to ethnographers' descriptions (Vanoverbergh 1937; Estioko & Griffin 1975).

Discernible framing patterns are established that presuppose cultural knowledge/practices. First, nouns of culturally prominent targets of fishing, harvesting, gathering, and hunting activities are framed as 'searching/collecting X,' forming intransitive verbs. Second, nouns of animals and supernatural spirits that are said to do harm to humans are framed as 'X attacks on humans,' deriving transitive verbs. Third, nouns of unusable remnants of food in Negrito culture, such as coconut husks and fish scales, are framed as 'remove X,' deriving transitive verbs. Finally, nouns of materials or resources useful in fishing, curing, and hunting are framed as 'make, create something out of X' to derive (in) transitive verbs.

It is also found that foraging domains, i.e. hunting, gathering, and fishing, serve as the richest conceptual resources for creating denominal verbs. The nouns related to the participants, prey, hunting grounds, times, instruments, and hunting or fishing techniques can become verbs to encode relevant activities, such as *məg-bəbe* (INTR-woman) 'for men to take women on a hunting trip' (Casiguran Agta); *mam-bulan* (INTR-moon) 'do moonlight hunting' (Arta); and *maŋ-hus* (INTR-fig) 'hiding up in a fig tree waiting to ambush game that might come to eat fig fruits' (Palanan Agta). This coincides with the Negrito people's ethnic character as *hunter-gatherers* long recognized by ethnographers.

This study suggests that an ethnosyntactic approach enables a semantic analysis of denominal verbs, which would not be possible through a culture-free mechanism, e.g., qualia structure. This further implies that frame semantics (Fillmore 1982), if properly combined with anthropological studies, can provide sound empirical grounds for exploring the connection between language and culture.

References

Enfield, Nick (ed.). 2002. *Ethnosyntax: Explorations in grammar and culture*. Oxford University Press.

Estioko, Agnes A. & Bion P. Griffin. 1975. The Ebukid Agta of Northeastern Luzon. *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 3(4). 237–244.

Evans, Nicholas. 2003. Context, culture, and structuration in the languages of Australia. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32. 13–40. doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093137.

Fillmore, Charles J. 1982. Frame semantics. *Linguistics in the morning calm*, 111–137. Seoul: The Linguistic Society of Korea, Hansin Publishing Co.

Hale, Kenneth L. 1966. Kinship reflections in syntax: Some Australian Languages. *Word* 22(1–3). 318–324.

Headland, Thomas N. & Janet D. Headland. 1974. *A Dumagat (Casiguran)-English dictionary*. Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University.

Healey, Phyllis M. 1960. *An Agta grammar*. Manila: Bureau of printing.

Vanoverbergh, Morice. 1937. Negritos of Eastern Luzon. *Anthropos* 32(5–6). 905–928.

Wierzbicka, Anna. 1979. Ethno-syntax and the philosophy of grammar. *Studies in Language* 3(3). 313–383.