

SIMILARITIES OF SOME BASIC NOTIONS IN ENGLISH AND TOBA BATAK LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In linguistics, the scientific study of meaning is called semantics. It covers the topic of some basic notions: sentences, utterances, propositions, reference and sense. The basic notions are described in such a way by finding the similarities of them in two languages (English and Toba Batak Language). It is aimed to enhance the comprehension of some basic notions in semantics.

Key words: similarities, basic notions, semantics.

INTRODUCTION

Semantics is the scientific study of meaning. It is a wide subject within the general study of language. An understanding of semantics is essential to the study of language acquisition (how language users acquire a sense of meaning, as speakers, writers, listeners and readers) and of language change (how meanings alter over time). It is important for understanding language in social contexts, as these are likely to affect meaning, and for understanding varieties of English and effects of style. It is thus one of the most fundamental concepts in linguistics. The study of semantics includes the study of how meaning is constructed, interpreted, clarified, obscured, illustrated, simplified, negotiated, contradicted and paraphrased.

This paper describes about some basic notions in semantics and their use in language. Some basic notions refer to sentences, utterances, propositions, reference and sense. There are two main languages that appear in this paper, they are English and Toba Batak language. Besides, there are also other tribes languages occur to add the reference and show more understanding of the topic.

A **sentence** is a string of words put together by the grammatical rules of the language expressing a complete thought (Hurford and Heasley, 1983:16). For example: *I eat an apple*. In this example, *I-eat-an-apple* is words put together in the grammatical rules and it is meaningful. It is different if it is arranged *an- apple- I -eat*. It is a collection of words but not grammatically arranged and thus less meaningful. A good sentence is a meaningful sentence.

An **utterance** is any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person (Hurford and Heasley, 1983:15). An **utterance** is the use by a particular speaker, on a particular occasion, of a piece of language, such as a sequence of sentences, or a single phrase, or even a single word. For example: "*I can see clearly now the rain is gone*". Someone can utter it in different ways, that is:

- 1) "I can see clearly now" // "the rain is gone."
- 2) "I can see clearly now the rain is gone."
- 3) "I can see clearly" // "now the rain is gone"
- 4) "I can see" // "clearly now the rain is gone"

The silence when the speaker utters the sentence produces different meaning for the speaker. Another example is the word “**what**”. If your friend let you know that the horror actress Suzanna has passed away last Wednesday, you might be surprised and say, “What?”. In this case, **what** refers to surprised. In other case, **what** can be meant as **asking for repetition**. It can be seen in the context when a student spoke too fast and his friends said, “What?”. In other words, meaning of an utterance is different depends on the silence of the person made.

A **proposition** is that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs. It can have true or false value. True proposition corresponds to the facts whereas false proposition does not correspond to the facts. For example:

1) *Bono has not arrived yet.*

The propositions of this sentence maybe: Bono has not arrived yet. He may be absent today. By the time the sentence is made and the reality is Bono hasn't arrived yet, so it is contained true value. If some time later Bono finally showed up, the propositions are false proposition/ false value.

2) *The blue pen is lying on my table.*

The propositions of this sentence maybe: The blue pen is lying on my table and it belongs to my brother. The propositions contain true value if the fact shows so. Actually the propositions above are in the mind of someone. We don't know them until they are spoken by the owner of the proposition himself.

Besides declarative sentence, question and imperative can be included in the proposition content because they can have either true or false proposition (Cruse, 2000: 27). For example:

1) What month is next month? (said on April)

It is May (true answer)

2) What month is next month? (said on May)

It is April (false answer)

3) Move **it here**! (How can you obey if you don't know what **it** refers to and where exactly **here** means).

A **reference** is a relationship between parts of a language and things outside the language (in the world). For example: the referent of *the present President in Indonesia* is Bapak Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. If the same referent asked in 2003, the answer is Ibu Megawati Sukarnoputri and if it is asked in 1948, the answer is Bapak Sukarno.

A **sense** is a relationship inside the language. A word can have more than one sense. For example: **bank**. The following sentences shows that bank don't have the same sense:

a) He banks \$10 every weekend. (bank = keep)

b) I save the money in the bank. (bank = bank)

c) The bulldozers banked the snow. (bank = pile)

d) The police found the boy sleeping in the river bank. (bank = edge, side)

DISCUSSION

Is there a difference between these three concepts: sentences, utterances, propositions? So, what are they? Utterance is physical events, located in space and time (as events like to be). They involve two “participants”- an agent who produces a linguistic object and that linguistic object itself. A sentence is an abstract entity “produced by the grammar,” though separated from the notion of a speaker (writer) and from meaning. A proposition is basically some sort of “idea” that can be “specified by language.”

One sentence corresponds to more than one utterance, for example: I didn’t understand what you mean by stating the same example over and over again. The utterance can be:

- a) “I didn’t understand what you mean by stating the same example over and over again?” (asking for clarification)
- b) “I didn’t quite understand what you mean by stating the same example over and over again!” (in mad expression)

The similar example can be found in Toba Batak language, for instance:

- “**Mulak do hita saonari**”. (Kita pulang sekarang/ We go home now)
In this sentence, if the speaker says it in the rising intonation, it means that he/she is angry (“**Mulak do hita saonari!**”). If the speaker says it in the flat intonation, it means that he/she only wants to give information (“**Mulak do hita saonari**”). If the speaker says it in the falling intonation, it means that he/she is asking for clarification/yes-no answer (“**Mulak do hita saonari?**”). So, the intonation of the speaker when utters the sentence, differs the meaning it conveys.
- “**Dang hutanda borumi, Ros.**” (“Tidak ku kenal anakmu, Ros” /“I don’t know your daughter, Ros”.)

There are two sentences that can be produced by different utterances, they are either the name of the daughter is Ros or the name of the addressee (the mother).

The same thing goes for proposition. The proposition *Ahmad Dhani mad at Maya Estianti* can be expressed by either “*Ahmad Dhani mad at Maya Estianti*” or “*I mad at Maya Estianti*” (spoken by Ahmad Dhani himself).

In Toba Batak language, the proposition of *I hate you* can have many expressions, such as: “*Sogo rohangku mamereng ho*”, “*Dang olo be ahu mamangkulingi ho*”, “*Dang olo be ahu mangkatai dohot ho*”, “*Torus di bahen ho songon ni, gabe tata rohangku. Ah... hatchit nai*”, etc.

A single utterance can correspond to more than one proposition. For example: “It’s dark in here” corresponds to the propositions *It’s dark in here*, *Someone should turn on the light*, *I don’t like being in the dark* and so on.

The same example can be found in Toba Batak language. For instance: if there is a party held at someone’s house. While everybody is busy doing things to assist the host, there is a young woman who lives in the house, sitting quietly and do nothing. So, one of the woman said, “*Ai tenang hian ma hamu*” relates to the propositions *Help us; Participate on something is better than just sit still and do nothing; In this situation, you’d better work together with others*, and so forth.

Reference is part of meaning. Assume that there are three trees in the field. Each tree has a unique reference. Each branch on each tree has a unique reference. And each

leaf and the field have a unique reference. There are two ways we can look at reference, they are: physical and perceptual.

In some tribe languages, there are words that have same reference but pronounce with a little bit deviation from one tribe to another tribe. For example: for the word **Rumah**, in **Javanese**, it is called **omah**; in **Bataknese**, it is called **jabu/bagas**; in **Acehnese**, it is called **rumoh**; in **Padangnese**, it is called **rumah**. Another example is the word **Minum**, in **Javanese**, it is called **ngombe**; in **Bataknese**, it is called **minum**; in **Karonese**, it is called **minem**; in **Acehnese**, it is called **minum**. The similarities of these tribe languages (vernacular) caused by the nearness of the region of the tribes.

Some language users tend to use their own terms when referring to certain object. It can be seen from the following examples:

- a) in Bahasa Indonesia *jangan* means *no*, but in Javanese, *Jangan* means *Vegetable*. If for instance, the conversation happens between a Javanese mother in law and her daughter in law (different tribe), it will cause a misunderstanding between them. The following is the contain of their conversation:

Mother in law (Mil)	: “Jangan dimakan”
Daughter in law (Dil)	: “Ya, bu”
M i l	: “Jangan dimakan”
D i l	: “Ya, bu”
M i l	: “Jangan dimakan” (This time with rising intonation, signing angry)
D i l	: “ Ya, bu” (replies with frightened voice)

This condition can be avoided if they speak the accepted language in Indonesia, that is Bahasa Indonesia or they can ask someone to be their interpreter.

- b) in Bahasa Karo, *pedas* means *hurry (cepat)* but in bahasa Jawa, *pedas* means *hot*. The unknown of the languages between the two speakers will result on unexpected thing. The following conversation explain so:
There is a Karonese worker who is very hungry decided to buy ‘*pecal*’ because there is no food stall near him.

Buyer (Karonese)	: “Buatkan saya pecalnya satu bungkus ya bu.” “Pedaskan ya bu.”
Pecal seller (Javanese)	: “Ya, pak”

After a while, the ‘*pecal*’ is ready. Then, the buyer eats it and he felt so hot and asking for water and more water.

- c) in Bahasa Karo, *Kari* means *later(nanti)* but in Bahasa Indonesia *kari* means *spicy food*.
When a young Karonese enters a restaurant, the waiter right away comes and the following conversation happens:

Waiter	:”Mau pesan apa, Pak?”
Young man	:” Kari”
Waiter	:” Baiklah”

A minute later, the waiter comes and serves the food.

Young man : “Lho, ini apa, saya tidak pesan.”
 Waiter :”Tapi tadi Bapak bilang kari. Ya ini saya bawakan”
 Young man :”Maksud saya nanti. Saya belum mau makan sekarang, saya sedang menunggu teman”
 Waiter :”Lalu bagaimana dengan pesanan ini?”
 Young man :” Tapi saya tidak pesan makanan ini. Titik”

The next thing may be happened is a fight. If only both speakers have mutual understanding between them.

The entire example above (a-c) happens because they don't have same words to refer to something. The language hasn't become a shared knowledge. The language is still become a part of one's community. As long as the language still belongs to certain community, not a shared knowledge - in this case, the tribe language- the misunderstanding will appear frequently.

There are also words that have the same reference but stated different meaning and later it creates different sense. For example: The reference of **Na Dila**, in **Toba Batak Language** means **suka bercerita** but in **Bahasa Indonesia**, it means **nama perempuan**. The sense in the Bataknese language is a negative sense but in Indonesia language, the sense is positive. The reference of **Bibi** in **Bataknese** means **bebek** but in **Bahasa Indonesia**, it means saudara perempuan ayah/ibu. The sense of this two meaning is positive.

Sense refers to how we see an object or the amount of information given about an object (Linguistics 322: 1). For example: the planet Venus. As a planet it has reference arbitrarily given the name Venus. It is often called the morning star when seen in the morning, and the evening star when seen in the evening. Thus, it has two senses, depending on the time of day is seen. The planet itself is the referent; the morning star is one sense, the evening star the other sense.

In other example suppose John has two sons, Bill and Henry; one nephew, Pete; and one grandson, Dave. When we refer to John as such, there is no sense. *John* is the arbitrary name given to the referent. The phrases below show it:

Bill's father
 Henry's father
 Pete's uncle
 Dave's grandfather

Each phrase either refers to John (Bill and Henry's father), or it may refer to John: Pete may have more than one uncle and Dave has second grandfather. In these cases the addressee does not know which of the possible referents is the intended referent except when clear from the context.

The four phrases listed above represent a different sense of the intended referent. Virtually every object can have several senses.

One sentence can have different sense. It can be seen from the following example:

- a. The police are looking for a man with one eye called Wilson.
 In the sentence above, there are two sentences bringing out the two different meanings, they are:
 - The police are looking for a man named Wilson, who has one eye.
 - One eye is called Wilson (What is the other eye called?)

b. There is a zebra crossing further down the road.

In the sentence above there are also two sentences bringing out the two different meanings, they are:

- There is a zebra cross (a safe place to cross the street) further down the road.
- There is a zebra (animal) crossing further down the road.

c. I had to get up early in the morning to open the door in my pajamas.

In the sentence above, there are two sentences bringing out the two different meanings, namely:

- When I opened the door this morning, I was wearing my pajamas.
- There is a door in my pajamas.

In Toba Batak language, the word **Bagas** has two meanings, they are: *house (rumah)* and *deep (dalam)*. Another word is **Bodat**. It has many meaning when it is said by different speaker. The real meaning is monkey but when a friend is joking, he called his friend with *bodat*, it means he is *joking*. But when a mother is angry and called her child with *bodat*, it means that she is *angry*.

On the relationship between sense and reference: the referent of an expression is often a thing or a person in the world; whereas the sense of an expression is not a thing at all. In fact, it is difficult to say what sort of entity the sense of an expression is. It is much easier to say whether or not two expressions have the same sense. The sense of an expression is an abstraction, but it is helpful to note that it is an abstraction that can be entertained in the mind of a language user. When a person understands fully what is said to him, it is reasonable to say that he grasps the sense of the expression he hears.

Just as one can talk of the same sense in different languages, so one can talk of expressions in different dialects of one language as having the same sense. For example:

- The word *taxi* and *cab* have the same sense but one is used in American English and other is use in British English.
- The two expressions below show the same sense.
 - *That night, I took a few minutes to look back over my day.*
 - *That night, I took a few minutes to do reflection on my day.*

A further explanation on the reference and sense can be seen when we want to look up meaning in the dictionary. When we look up the meaning of a word in the dictionary, we will find an expression with the same sense not a referent with the same sense. Dictionary is full of words not full of things like a box or a book.

CONCLUSION

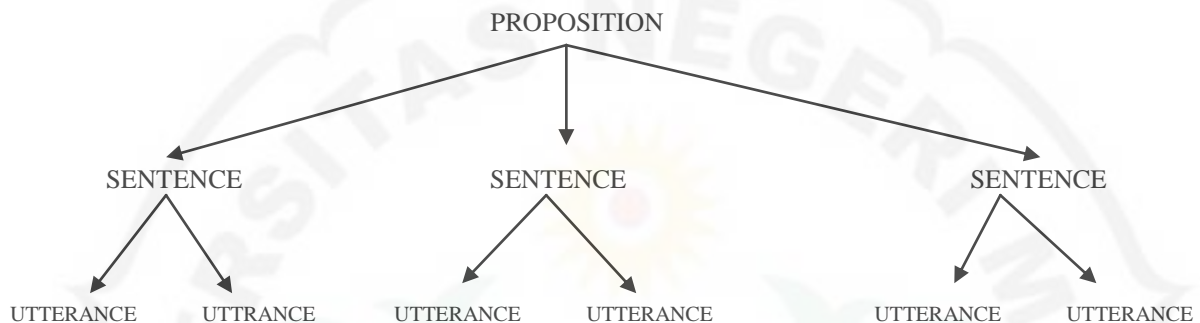
The notions of sense and reference as well as the notions of sentence, utterance, and proposition are central to the study of meaning. It takes a deeper understanding to comprehend them. Nevertheless, they still can be learned and acquired from formal setting, everyday experience recorded in conversation, and etc.

The basic notions above are found not only in English but in tribe languages in Indonesia, particularly Toba Batak Language, the basic notions mentioned are:

- A single utterance can correspond to more than one proposition
- A single utterance can correspond to more than one sentence
- A single sentence can be used in multiple utterances
- A single sentence can convey more than one proposition

- A single proposition can be expressed by more than one sentence
- A single proposition can be expressed by more than one utterance

The above sentences can be made into diagram:



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Sekilas tentang penulis : Marisi Debora, S.Pd., adalah dosen pada jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris FBS Unimed.



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