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An analysis of transitivity and control in SENĆOŦEN

by Cavan Wagner

SENĆOŦEN is a language that exhibits transitivity morphemes which encode not only for transitivity, but control as well. A Transitive sentence is usually one that includes a direct object, so in English a transitive sentence would be “I hit the ball”, while an intransitive sentence would be “I walked”. A morpheme is a grammatical segment, like the English plural -s. In SENĆOŦEN, in order to use a transitive sentence, it is necessary to affix a transitivity morpheme. These morphemes are also necessary for determining whether the subject is in control of the action or not. While previous scholars have analyzed the control aspect of transitivity in SENĆOŦEN and other Salish languages (Montler 1986; Thompson 1976), transitivity is less looked at. Rather than analyzing these morphemes in terms of degrees of control as Thompson (1976, 1982, 1985) has done, I examine the degrees of transitivity in SENĆOŦEN transitivity morphemes. One issue previous analyses have failed to address is the co-occurrence of control and transitivity within one verb type.

My analysis of transitivity in SENĆOŦEN utilizes Thompson & Hopper’s (1980) components of transitivity. I break down six particular morphemes using four components from Thompson & Hopper’s model of transitivity. These components include PARTICIPANT, VOLITIONALITY, ASPECT, and AFFECTEDNESS OF THE O. Each component can be ranked as having a high or low degree of transitivity, and they are collectively considered when determining the degree of transitivity each morpheme exhibits. The PARTICIPANT component is determined by the number of participants expressed in the valency. Two participants (such as a subject and object) equate a higher degree of transitivity while one participant is associated with a lower degree of transitivity. If a subject is said to act volitionally then the VOLITIONALITY component is of a higher degree of transitivity, while non-volitionality associates with low transitivity. A telic aspect shows higher transitivity and atelic aspect a lower degree of transitivity. A telic action is one with an endpoint, like “I wrote a letter,” as opposed to the atelic “I was writing a letter”, where it is not known whether the action has finished or not. The last component, AFFECTEDNESS OF O, is determined by how affected an object is by the action. A fully affected object associates with a higher degree of transitivity. I apply these four components to the transitivity morphemes in SENĆOŦEN in order to understand them as a scale of transitivity, beginning with the least transitive and ending with the most transitive.

I explain the co-occurrence of control and valency using these four components to delineate the various degrees of transitivity in SENĆOŦEN. I propose that control and valency occur in SENĆOŦEN transitivity morphemes as components of transitivity.

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