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A Semantic Map for Imperative-Hortatives

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Introduction

This chapter is about similarities and differences in the way languages express orders, requests and exhortations. It crucially employs a so-called ‘semantic map’. The concept of the semantic map will be presented in section 2.1. Section 2.2 sketches some issues in the study of Imperatives and Imperative-like constructions. In section 2.3 a semantic map is proposed that yields some insights in the study of Imperatives and Imperative-like structures.

2.1 Semantic maps

Semantic maps, also called ‘mental’ or ‘cognitive’, have become a powerful tool in cross-linguistic analysis. The idea is not actually new, but at least its prominence in typology is. Typological semantic mapping has been undertaken for a great many aspects of meaning, including tense and aspect (Anderson 1982), evidentiality (Anderson 1986), conditionals (Traugott 1985), voice (Kemmer 1993) and indefiniteness (Haspelmath 1997). In what follows we will use examples from the realm of modality.

Much of modern typology attempts to explain form on the basis of meaning. Elements of structure are similar because the meanings they encode are similar. The hypothesis holds both for elements within one language and across languages. Consider the sentences in (1), and more particularly the functions of the modal verb must:

(1) a. Mary must go home now.
    b. Mary must be home now.
(1a) expresses an obligation and (1b) a high probability. Obligation and high probability are by no means the same concepts, yet they are similar. An obligation is a situational necessity: there is something in the state of affairs described in (1a), maybe somebody’s wish or command, that necessitates Mary’s leaving. A high probability is also a kind of necessity, but it is crucially epistemic or inferential and refers to a judgement of the speaker and a degree of commitment. Epistemic necessity is the necessity of a judgement relative to other judgements. Perhaps the speaker believes that Mary always goes to work by bike, perhaps (s)he notices that Mary’s bike is no longer there, and (s)he then deduces that Mary must be home. In English, the auxiliary must can be used for both obligation and high probability. In the Tungusic language Evenki, however, the two meanings or uses do not share any marker. Both meanings are, however, perfectly expressible. For situational necessity it is possible to use the suffix -mAchin and for epistemic necessity the suffix -nA will do.

(2) Evenki (Nedjalkov 1997: 269, 264, 265)

   my friend-three-PROL hour-PROL go.away-1SG.POSS OBL-3SG
   ‘My friend must go/leave in three hours.’

b. Su tar asatkan-me sa:-na-s.
   you that girl-ACC.DEF know-PROB-2PL
   ‘You probably know that girl.’

We now have a mini-typology of languages. There are at least two types of languages in the world: those that have a marker that can express both situational and epistemic necessity, and those that do not have any such marker, but need two markers. We also have a mini-map.

(3) situational necessity —— epistemic necessity

Situational and epistemic necessity occupy two distinct areas in semantic space: this is symbolized by the fact that each is named separately. But these concepts are related: this is symbolized by the connecting line. On this map we can plot the function of English must and of Evenki -mAchin and -nA.