

Lexical incorporation and hyponymy in Angami¹: some observations

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As is well known, hyponymy is the paradigmatic lexical relationship of unilateral, asymmetrical implication (a lexical relation of bilateral symmetrical implication being synonymy) that holds between a generic and inclusive superordinate word (hyperonym) and its paradigms (hyponyms) which are specific and in a sense less inclusive. Thus, in Angami, *mekho* 'basket' is a hyperonym of which *khorha*, *khophi*, *khori*², *khope*, *khodi*, *khoshie*, and *merha* are hyponyms, defined in terms of the shape or function of the referent of the hyperonym, and the sex and age of the bearers.

The (no more than taxonomic) goal of this note is to document facts of lexical incorporation in Angami and then to make some observations about the related lexical phenomenon of hyponymy.

Lexical incorporation is here defined as integration of an argument or arguments into the lexical space of verbs without any morphological reflex. Angami verbs may be lexically marked for the subject, object, instrument, object/manner, goal, or altitude/distance of the verbal event.

Subject-incorporation.

ta	'bite'	(sbj: beings with mouths)
meti	'bite'	(sbj: beings with snouts)
medu	'bite'	(sbj: beings without mouths or snouts, e.g. birds, snakes)
lie	'marry'	(sbj: msc. sg.)
phü	'marry'	(sbj: fem. sg.)
keri	'marry'	(sbj: du. or pl.)

¹ a. Angami Naga is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in North-East India.

b. This rather inchoate piece of work was read to a Seminar on Lexical Relations held at the Central Institute of Indian Languages in February 1984. It could do with more data which will facilitate a deeper analysis than has been possible.

² *ü* is a retracted lower-high unrounded central vowel.

Object-incorporation.

chu	'wash human face'
kenu	'wash human mouth'
meti	'wash human hands'
rülu	'wash human body'
khüü	'wash other individual body parts, utensils, etc.'
meñi	'wash clothes'

Instrument-incorporation.

re	'pierce with a sharp instrument'
gi	'pierce with horns, spear'
mebo	'touch with lips, kiss'
mesü	'strike with legs, kick'

Object- and manner-incorporation.

re	'cut with with <i>dao</i> -like action' (i.e., by hacking)
gi	'cut wood with saw-like action'
be	'cut hair with scissors-like action'
da	'cut hair with knife-like action'

Goal-incorporation.

cu	'go to field, forest'
kehu	'go to church'

Altitude- and distance-incorporation.

phi	'go over on the same level'
kho	'go up to a distant place'
ke	'go down to a distant place'
pa	'go up to a nearby place'
le	'go down to a nearby place'
cu	'go slightly down to a distant place'

In the following, verb-final -r carries the deictic meaning of "towards the speaker:"

phir	'come over on the same level'
khör	'come up to a distant place'
ker	'come down to a distant place'

par	'come up to a nearby place'
ler	'come down to a nearby place'
cur	'come slightly down to a distant place'

Note that *vo* 'go' and *vor* 'come' are neutral with respect to altitude, distance, and goal.

Hyponymy originates when language goes off on a tangent from a basic core lexical meaning and crams lexical space with additional information on certain lines. Hyponymy, that is to say, issues out of lexical incorporation.

Two expressions I have just used merit extended comment. They are "a basic core lexical meaning" and "on certain lines."

It is well known that a language might have a group of differentiated hyponyms with no overarching hyperonym that subsumes them. Angami, for instance, does not have hyperonyms for the generic ideas of 'bite', 'marry', etc. On the basis of linguistic evidence one could take either of two tacks: either that the language in question does not in fact have semantic primes from which hyponyms ramify, or that, unlike scientific taxonomies, systems of linguistic hyponymy tend to have gaps, asymmetries, indeterminacies. While the former has to be, in the final analysis, settled by evidence about the human cognitive make-up, the latter has a negative overtone which seems unwarranted. It seems rather that speakers of particular languages need more information before they speak than speakers of certain other languages. Thus, for instance, unlike an English speaker a speaker of Angami needs to know about the shape of the oral entrance into the body before he uses any of the various verbs denoting 'bite'.

"On certain lines" refers, as one would expect, to lines defined by cultural salience. That is, hyponymy is elaborate in semantic fields which are culturally prominent. Thus, unlike English and Kannada, Angami displays strong hyponymy in the verbal semantic fields of washing, cutting, physical movement, and so on, and the nominal semantic fields of basket, bamboo, spear, shawl³, etc. But elaborate hyponymy need not necessarily mean cultural salience. Thus, the different lexicalizations meaning 'marry' in Angami (cases of subject-incorporation) and the various co-hyponyms marked in English for manner (e.g., *stalk* = 'move seriously/haughtily', *jog* = 'move with the sense of being shaken up and down', *saunter/ramble/jaunt/stroll* = 'move as fancy leads', *swagger* = 'move in a self-important way', *slog/flog/plod/trudge* = 'move exerting oneself', *waddle* =

³ See Giridhar 1986 for details of nominal hyponymy.

'move as ducks do', *scurry* = 'move slightly and quickly, as rats do', etc.) seem to be no more culturally motivated than the order of clauses in sentences or the number of nasal phonemes in the language.

Angami has cases of different sets of hyponyms which are headed by a single hyperonym. For example, both *vo* 'go' and *vor* 'come' are superordinate terms for two sets of hyponyms, namely, the altitude- and distance-incorporating verbs and the goal-incorporating ones. This, of course, is nothing novel. English, for example, has different sets of hyponyms represented by, e.g., *scuttle* = 'move hurriedly', i.e. "move + manner," and *scale* = 'move up', i.e. "move + direction," which hyponymize the core verb *move*. What seems to be peculiar to Angami, however, is hyponymy which lexicalizes two arguments, e.g., object and manner, or altitude and distance.

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REFERENCES

- Giridhar, P. P. 1986. *Angami-English-Hindi Dictionary*. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.