

Lexical and Grammatical Meaning in Malayalam

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Introduction

Traditionally saying, meanings are ideas or concepts, which can be transferred from one mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearer by embodying them as it were, in the forms one language or other. The meaning of a sentence is the product of both lexical and grammatical meaning. ie. the meaning of the constituent lexemes and of the grammatical constructions that relate one lexeme syntagmatically to another. (John Lyons, 1981, 2009).

Lexical meaning is the meaning of word without paying attention to the way that is used or to the words that occur with it. Grammatical meaning is the meaning in terms of grammar. Grammatical meaning refers to that part of meaning which indicates grammatical relationships on formatives, such as tense meaning, singular meaning etc. Grammatical meaning consists of:

- (1) Word classes, e.g. Modern (adj.), modernize (verb), modernization (noun). naṭannu (verb), naṭattam (noun).
- (2) Inflected paradigm. e.g. Grammatical meaning of plurality. Eg. kuṭṭikaḷ 'children', paṭakkam.

Lexical meaning is dominant in content words, whereas grammatical meaning is dominant in function words. Examples: ciriccu 'laughed', karaññu 'cried', pōyi 'went'. Here different lexical meaning, same grammatical meaning (verbs). kuṭṭi 'child', kuṭṭikaḷ 'children', here same lexical meaning, different grammatical meaning (number).

Grammar and meaning are interrelated. Grammar reflects the ways in which the lexicon operates as means of communication and as instruments of thoughts.

The difference between lexical and grammatical meaning does not coincide with the difference between descriptive and non-descriptive meaning. The difference between the lexical and grammatical meaning depends, in principle upon the difference between the vocabulary (Lexicon) and grammar.

Lexical and Grammatical meaning is very important meanings in linguistic study. These meanings have different roles in linguistic semantics. There is very much difference between the

two. Every language has a grammatical system and different languages have somewhat different grammatical systems. In Malayalam the grammatical roles are determined by the morphological inflections.

This paper tries to explore this linguistic features correlated with the lexical and grammatical meaning in Malayalam.

Morphology

Inflection of words in Malayalam is entirely dominated by features of agglutinative typology. As a rule, morphological categories are expressed by suffixes which can have only one grammatical meaning in each case. The system of the parts of speech in Malayalam comprises nouns, adjectives, pronouns, numerals, verbs etc. Among them the verbs and numerals and the majority of the pronouns can be inflected, the rest are invariables. The use of plural forms is governed by the semantics of nouns. Countable nouns freely form their plurals, whereas uncountable nouns are used only in the singular number. E.g. Mēgham ‘cloud’ - Mēghaññaḷ ‘clouds’, niRam ‘colour’ - niRaññaḷ ‘colours’, nīḷam ‘length’, dhairyam ‘courage’.

Nouns which are countable in one meaning and uncountable in another form in their plurals accordingly.

E.g. cempu ‘copper’, ‘copper vessel’
cempukaḷ ‘copper vessels’

The main function of the noun in nominative case is that of the subject or the nominal predicative. E.g. puuvan kooḷi bhaṅgiyuḷḷa oru pakṣi aakunnu. ‘The cock is a beautiful bird’. In certain constructions, the noun in the nominative case can also perform the role of simple nominal predicate.

E.g. enRe peeru raaman. ‘My name is Rama’.

The direct object is commonly expressed by the noun in the nominative case. If this noun denotes a non-human object thought of indefinitely.

E.g. piṭakkooḷi muttayiṭum. ‘The hen lays eggs.’
raajaavine niikkam ceytu. ‘The king was disposed from the throne’.

Noun in the nominative case can also be used for expressing the attributive meaning. eg. naalunaaḷ vaḷi duuram. ‘The distance of four days journey’ and frequently in combination with related words, various adverbial meanings. E.g. kuRaccu duuram cennappooḷ avar veeRoru vaḷikku vannu. ‘Having walked a little further, they came out to another road’. oru vanti veegam veenam . ‘We need a cart urgently’.

The principal meaning of the dative case is that of a person or an object which the action is directly to on the meaning of possessor.eg. avar talasserikku pooyi. 'They went to Thalassari'.

In a more abstract sense the noun in a dative case can denote an orienting point, a limit in space or time, a goal or intention,

e.g. uccaykku caaya veeṇam. 'Bring me some tea at noon'.

e.g. vaatattinu alooppatimarunnu untoo?..... 'Is there any allopathic medicine for rheumatism?'

In dative constructions nouns in the dative case can denote the agent of action.

e.g. raamuvinu pattu vayassaayi. 'Ramu was ten years old'.

In genitive suffix nouns with the optional increment –in, in the oblique cases take the genitive suffix –re, when –in is employed and the suffix -uṭe, when –in is missing.

E.g. kāy-kāyūṭe-kālinRe

In certain construction, nouns in locative case can express the ablative meaning.

E.g. ayaal eeRRavum nallavaril oraaḷaṇu. 'He is one of the best'.

The grammatical category, verb is that of negative and positive. The opposition of positive and negative forms is primordial in the Malayalam verb inflection and pervades the whole verbal paradigm, through there is no full symmetry between positive and negative parts. E.g. ayaḷ vannu. "She came". ayaḷ vanilla. "She did not come".

Sometimes linguists draw a distinction between full words, belonging to the major parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and so-called function words of various kinds including the conjunctions (um,) the negative particle to illustrate the distinction from English. It is the characteristics of such function words that belong to classes of small membership and that their distribution tends to be very strongly determined by the syntactic rules of the language. Very often they play the same role as inflectional variation does in other languages. It is generally accepted that the function words are less fully lexical than are nouns, verbs, adjectives and most adverbs, and furthermore that some function words are more lexical in character than others. In the limiting case where a function word cannot occur in a given syntactic construction, it has no lexical meaning at all. But between the limiting case of purely grammatical words without lexical meaning, and full lexemes at the other extreme, there are many subclasses of function words, which without being full lexemes contribute some measure of lexical meaning to the sentences in which they occur. ie., the difference between full words and function words is matched in a morpheme- based grammar by the difference between lexical and grammatical morphemes

It is difficult to draw a sharp distinction between the grammar of a language and its vocabulary. An important theoretical point is that what is lexicalized in one language may be grammaticalized in another language. For example. the lexical distinction between ' konnu' 'killed'

and cattu 'died' is matched in many other languages by the grammatical distinction between a causative verb and a corresponding non-causative verb.

What some languages can convey by means of the grammatical category of tense (past vs. present) other language without tense, must convey by means of lexemes meaning, say, 'in the past' vs 'now'. These two examples, however, illustrate a point that must be made in qualification of the principle that the same semantic distinction may be either lexicalized or grammaticalized.

Another aspect of the relation between semantics and grammar the question of meaningfulness and grammaticality.

The problem of deciding whether a particular anomalous collocation (i.e., grammatically connected combination of lexemes) is anomalous by virtue of the meaning of the constituent lexemes and of the grammatical construction which brings them together or for some other reason. For e.g. the blond (- haired) boy and 'the bay (-colored) horse' are normal collections, whereas the blond horse and the bay boy are not.

In Malayalam there are certain collocations:

puu-p'aRiccu 'Plucked the flower'
puu - nulli
puu - potṭiccu
māñña-paRiccu. 'Plucked the mango'

In māñña -potṭiccu'. "Broke the mango". (meaning change)
teeñña- atatti ; 'Plucked the coconut'
teeñña Vetṭi " "
teeñña iṭṭu " "

There are many lexemes in all languages whose meaning cannot be considered to be totally independent of the collocations in which they most characteristically occur. The general problem is drawing the boundary between the linguistic and non-linguistic determinants of grammaticality.

Reference

Lyons, John 1981, 2009. Language and Linguistics: An introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
