The Alternations and the Semantic Components of the Verb [1]Dre 'Tear' in Sorani Kurdish and its English Equivalent 'Tear'

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a sematic-syntactic analysis of verbs relating to the action of 'tearing' in Sorani Kurdish and English; it employs the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (hereafter, NSM) developed by Anna Wierzbicka and her colleagues. I will use NSM to fully investigte the meanings of the two verbs and to reveal the semantic structures and distinctive aspects of verbs under investigation. The NSM methodology, based on semantic primes and a grammar of combinability, enables the researcher to dig deep into language-specific concepts in a clear cut manner, while at the same not being a linguistic bias.

Keywords

Sorani, Kurdish, English, semantics, alternations, verb, dr, Natural Semantic Metalanguage.

1.   Introduction

This paper sheds lights on the verbs 'dr' and 'tear' in Sorani Kurdish and English, and shows the different syntactic alternations of the verbs. One of the main sections that has been discussed here is that how adding some prefixes to the verb dr would affect the semantic components of the verb and decided the manner in which the action of the verb is achieved besides the direction of the action. The affix that is added to the verb confines the use of the verb to the concrete use only.

Section 2 introduces the reader to Sorani dialect and the geographical places where it is spoken, section 3 presents The MNS approach briefly; section 4 and 5 deal with the semantic components and the syntactic alternations of the verbs 'dr' and 'tear' in Sorani Kurdish and English. Section 6 shows how adding affixes to the verb 'dr' leads to change the semantic components of the verb. Section 7 deals with the semantic and syntactic alternations of the verb tear in English. There a discussion section in the paper that compares the semantic and the syntactic characteristics of the verbs. The paper ends in a conclusion and a list of references used in this work.

2.   Sorani Kurdish

Kurdish is one of the languages spoken in western Asia by the Kurds. It belongs to the Iranian language family, which is considered to be a branch of Indo-Iranian from the Indo-European language family (Abdullah 1967). Languages closely related to Kurdish include Balochi, Gileki, and Talysh, languages which belong to the northwestern branch of the Iranian language family. Kurdish is spoken in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The exact number of people who speak Kurdish in the world is not known, both because of the unstable political situation in Kurdish areas and because of the great number of Kurds who live in the diaspora. Kurds are considered to be the fourth largest ethnicity in the Middle East after the Arabs, Persians, and Turks (Erikson 2006). Most Kurds are bilingual. This is due at least in part to the fact that there is no independent Kurdish state, and so they tend to live in linguistically diverse areas, interspersed with other populations in different countries. For example, the Kurds in Turkey speaks Kurdish and Turkish, and the Kurds in Iraq speak Kurdish and Arabic.

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1 The infinitive form of the verb is (dr) but I used it as (dre) to the ease the pronunciation.

3. The NSM Approach

The natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) is a linguistic theory based on the conception of Polish professor Andrzej Bogusławski. The leading proponents of the theory are Anna Wierzbicka at Warsaw University and later at the Australian National University who originated the theory in the early 1970s (Wierzbicka 1972), and Cliff Goddard at Australia's Griffith University (Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002). The NSM approach is an approach that depends on semantic primes and a grammar of combinability. Semantic primes are a small set of universal meanings, which can be found as words or word-like components in all natural languages. Those words can be translated and rendered into any language and understood by all language users. Some good examples of those primes are (I, YOU, KNOW, GOOD and TO). By combining these simple basic concepts, we can reveal the meaning of a word which is specific to a certain language. (Otomo, A., & Torii, A, ((2006)).

4. The semantic components of the verb 'dr' in Sorani Kurdish[1]

The verb 'dr' in Sorani Kurdish is translated into the verb (tear) in English (Nawxosh, 2013).The verb dr 'tear' in Sorani Kurdish refers to action that can be achieved by using the force of human hand only. The following examples will explain what I mentioned:

1. Qumash- aka -m   ba   dast   dr
   cloth-   def.- NOM1[2]   with   hand   tear-pas.
   "I tore the cloth with my hands"

2. kartonak- ak-   i   ba   dast   dr-e
   board-   def.- ERG3   with   hand   tear-pas.ABS3
   "He tore the board with his hands"

When the action of the verb 'dr' is applied on an object by hand, the results seems chaotic and messy. The action denoted by the verb 'dr' is achieved intentionally, which means that the agent who achieves the action has the intention to achieve it already. The action cannot be done unintentionally especially. For example:

3. *min na-m   zani   ba   dast   qumash- aka – m   dr
   I   not-ABS1   know   with   hand   cloth-   def. –ABS1   tear-pas.ABS3
   *"I did not know (realize) that I tore the cloth"

No native speaker of Sorani Kurdish would accept sentence (3) as the sentence implies that the action is achieved unintentionally. The verb 'dr' could be analyzed as an action of separating an object without a tool, the results that show on the object are neither clean nor straight. The action needs an agent to be achieved. In another way:

X (apply the action of separating on) Y

X Dre (tear) Y

In the above the (X) represents the agent and the (Y) represents the object that undergoes the action of tearing.

I will provide a table that shows the objects that can undergo the action of verb 'dr' in Sorani Kurdish: **Table (1): objects that undergo the action of the verb "dr"**

The objects
Cloth
Paper
Leather

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1 I would like to thank DR. Mohammad Ahmad Kasas for helping me with his authentic information in writing this section.

2 I will provide an abbreviation list at the end of the paper to explain the abbreviated forms used in the paper.

An ear
Eardrum
Skin
Leather flask

5.The syntactic alternations of the verb 'dr' I Sorani Kurdish

The verb 'dr' in Sorani Kurdish undergoes the causative, middle and passive alternations.

a. The causative alternation:

The verb "dr" undergoes the causative alternation. The verb denotes an action that is achieved by a doer and the effect of the action is reflected on an object as in (4):

    4. barg-dro-   ka qumash-aka-i dr-   e
      cloth-sewer-def. cloth-def. - tear-pas.ABS3
        "The sewer tore the cloth"

The verb 'dr' is one of the verbs in which the causative marker is attached to the verb when the agent achieves the action intentionally as in (5):

    5. Mindal-aka parday-ee   gwe dra-   n   ba   penuus
      child-def.   drum- of- ear   tear- pas.-caus. with   pencil
         "The kid tore his eardrum with a pencil"

b. The conative alternation:

The conative frame, named after Latin conor/conari 'to try', is most often treated with reference to the conative alternation, a transitivity alternation that modifies the interpretation of a transitive verb towards denoting "an 'attempted action' without specifying whether the action was actually carried out" (Levin 1993: 42). The transitive variant, in contrast, specifies that the action has indeed been carried out. For example, notice the contrast between the following pairs of examples:

    (6)   a. I shot the bird.
           b. I shot at the bird.

    (6a) entails that the bullet actually reached the target (the bird) but such an entailment does not hold in (6b).

The verb 'dr' does not undergo the inchoative alternation because the verb entails an action that is actually achieved not only an attempt to achieve the action.

    c.   The middle alternation:

Middle alternation doesn't refer to specific events, but to possible events. They are thus generic statements, whence their use in the simple present rather than the progressive. The verb 'dr' undergoes the middle alternation. The middle alternation usually needs an adverb that expresses the manner in which the action is achieved.

    7. [1]bringok baasani da-   dr-   (t)
      cloth   easily imperf.tear-ABS2
      "Bringok can be easily torn"

    d. Passive alternation:

The verb 'dr' undergoes the passive alternation in Kurdish. It denotes an action achieved on a theme by an implicit agent. The passive morpheme *-ra* is added to the verb to refer to the implicit agent, which is not in the structure of the sentence

    8. mindal-an   chard- i   automobile- aka- y- an dra-   n
      children- pl car cover-of car-   def.- ASB3 pl. tear-pas.-cause.
      "The children tore the car cover"

6. The verb 'dr' and the prefixes *da-* and *hal-.*

Verbs have their own elements of meaning which include the kind of the action (if the verb refers to an action), the tools or the means by which the action is achieved, directionality, besides

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1 It is a very thin, delicate kind of cloth that can be easily torn.

the objects that needs to be used with the verb. Adding a prefix to the root of the verb changes the semantics of the verb, in other words, it adds new elements and components of meaning to the original meaning, and sometimes it changes all the contexts in which the verbs is used. Languages differ in their means of modifying the original meaning of verbs. English uses verb particles to modify verb meaning, while Sorani Kurdish utilizes prefixes to modify the meaning of verbs. Sorani Kurdish utilizes prefixes such as *da-* and *hal-* to add directionality element to the original meaning of the verbs when this prefix is added to a change –of- state verb, it adds new components to the verb meaning as the directional component. The various examples used in this work shows clearly that those prefixes can be a way to extend the meaning of the verbs, and creates new contexts in which the verbs can be used. Adding the prefix *hal-* to the root of the verb 'dr' makes a bit of change in the original meaning of the verb as it give it the sense of a cutting from top to bottom, as the following example shows:

9. gosht   frosh- aka wurgi mar- aka- i   hal- dr-   e
    meat- seller- def. girh   lamb –def.- of   pref- tear-pas.ABS3
   "The butcher tore the lamb's girth"

Sentence (4) shows how the verb is used to indicate the action that is achieved by the butcher which is tearing the girth of the animal and it shows how the action is achieved from top to bottom.

10. lq-   i dar- aka   pest-i dast-   i   hal- dr-   e
     branch- of- tree- def.   skin-of- hand- ERG3   pref- tear-pas.ABS3
    "The branch of the tree ripped his skin"

Sentence (10) expresses the same idea that the action of injuring has happened from top to bottom which means that directionality plays a great role in showing the way the action is achieved.

11.Gwara qurs- aka qwe- i kch- aka--- i   hal-dr-   e
    earring heavy- def. ear- of girl- def.- ERG3   pre-dr-pas..-ABS3
   "The heavy earring tore the girls ear"

Example (11) shows clearly how the prefix *hal-* indicated the direction of the action as the earing hangs out from the ear and as it seems heavy and big, it causes to tear the ear and the action of tearing is happening from top to bottom.

The above examples show clearly that adding the prefix *hal-*to the root of the verb 'dr' adds a new component to the original meaning of the verb. The component is the direction in which the action is achieved which is from top to the bottom. There is another prefix in Sorani Kurdish which is *da-* and this prefix can be added to the verb 'dr' and it also adds the component of directionality to the other components of the verb, but it differs in the sense that it entails that the action is achieved from the bottom to the top:

12. Bazergan- aka qumash-aka-i   da- dr-   e
     seller-   def. cloth-the- ERG3 pref. tear-pas.ABS3
    "The draper tore the cloth"

In (12) the verb 'dr' shows the action of tearing is achieved from the bottom to the top which means that directionality is very clear in the fulfillment of the action.

13. afrat- aka jle   xo-   i   da-dr-   e   la daxa
     woman-the clothes-self-ERG3   pref.-tear-pas.-ABS3 of   anger
    "The woman tore out her clothes out of her anger"

Again directionality is very clear in achieving the action of tearing in (13) which shows the role of the prefix *da-* in expressing the direction of the action.

The prefixes *da-*and *hal-* are used with many verbs in Sorani Kurdish especially the change-of- state verbs and they add new semantic component to the original ones of the verb. They both entails directionality, e.g. they shows the direction in which the action is achieved. The prefix *hal-* shows that the action is achieved from top to the bottom, while the prefix da- shows that the action is achieved from the bottom to the top.

7- The verb 'tear' in English

The verb 'tear' is an event verb in English; it is a member of the change of state verbs. These verbs refer to action that brings about a change in the "material integrity" of some entity (Hale and Keyser (1987)). The verb tear does not provide information about how the change is going to happen.

All of the tear-like verbs in English describe the process of separating something with one's hands or may be with teeth. The verb tear cannot be used with reflexive objects as in:

*(14)   The piece of cloth torn itself.

No type of cutting tool is implemented as knife, scissors etc. (Otomo, and Akiko,2006)

(15)   John tore the cloth.

(16)   John tore the bread.

(17)   John tore the wrapping paper.

The quality of the various objects that undergoes the action of the verb 'tear' is that these are 'things that one can separate using the hands'. Such objects cannot be too 'hard' or too 'soft'. If the object is too hard – metal for example – then one cannot separate it by hand; one would probably need some other instrument. On the other hand, if the object is too soft – jelly for example – then one could probably separate it using only one hand. Thus, the object must be something that one can rip apart only by using both hands, for which one needs no other instruments. This is the basic sense of the objects for tear; and it is common to the Japanese verbs as well. (Hale and Keyser (1987)).

Focusing now on the manner of 'tearing', English tear does not specify any particular or direction which means that the verb does not specify the direction whether the action is achieved from bottom to top or from right to left or vice a versa.

English verb 'tear' does not require any specific result (but it still can). In other words a person tearing something does not have to intend some specific result, as long as the object will become 'two things' as a result of tearing (Otomo, and Akiko, 2006).

The verb 'tear' undergoes the causative alternations as:

(18)   She tore a calf muscle playing squash.

It undergoes the middle alternation as in:

(19)   Careful—the fabric tears very easily.

It also undergoes the passive:

(20)   I was torn between my parents and my friend.

Interestingly the verb 'tear' cannot be used in the inchoative alternation:

*(21)   The cloth tore

It seems that the verb needs the agent to be there in the structure of the sentence and the sentence would be ungrammatical without it.

In what follows I will show some differences and similarities between the verb tear in English and the verb 'dr' in Sorani Kurdish.

8- Discussion:

Semantically, the verbs 'tear' and 'dr' both express an action of separating an object into two pieces. The action is achieved by either hands or teeth, which means that there is no tool involved in the action of tearing. The objects that undergo the action of the verbs 'tear' and 'dr' have to be not a hard object as wood, in other words the object has to have the ability to be 'separated' by hand or teeth.

Syntactically, the verb 'tear' in English can undergoes the causative, middle and passive alternations, while the verb 'dr' can undergoes the causative, middle, and passive alternations.

Even the two verbs of tearing in English and Sorani Kurdish share many similarities semantically and syntactically, but still there many differences between them regarding the kinds of objects that can undergo the actions. For example, (ear, skin) can undergo the action of the verb 'dr'

but they cannot undergo the action of the verb 'tear' in English. Besides, the verb 'dr' can be used with some kind of prefixes as 'hal' and 'da' and those prefixes would add new element of meaning to the original meaning of the verb which is directionality. The verb 'tear' in English cannot be cooperated with any kind of prefixes to show directionality.

The two verbs of separating in English and Sorani Kurdish share some characteristics but show many differences semantically and syntactically.

9. Conclusion

To conclude Sorani Kurdish verb demonstrate different semantic components from the English verb 'tear' in its meaning as it is used in different contexts with different objects. Syntactically the verb *dr* undergoes the causative, inchoative, middle and passive alternations but not the conative alternations. Adding suffixes to the root of the verb leads to add more semantic components to the original meaning components of the verb. Generally speaking the verb *dr* has some semantic and syntactic specific aspects driven from dialect and the uses of the verb.

List of abbreviations
Cause: Causative marker
DEF: definite
ERG: eragative case
IMP: imperative aspect
Indef: indefinite article
Past: Past tense marker
Pl: Plural marker
Imperf: imperfect
ABS: absolutive
NOM: nominative case
Perf: perfect

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