Handout 11: Predicates and participants

Terminology

- **predicate**: a description of an entity, or an event in which entities can participate.
- **participant**: an entity (person or thing) that is described by a predicate.
  - **subject**: the main participant.
  - **object**: a participant that is not the subject.
- **clause**: a single predicate and its participants.
- **sentence**: one or more clauses that represent a single utterance.
- **lexical word**: a word that can mean something by itself.
  - **verb**: a word that refers to an action or event.
  - **noun**: a word that refers to an entity (person or thing).
  - **adjective**: a word that describes a noun.
- **function word**: a word with abstract meaning that contributes to sentence structure.
  - **pronoun**: a word that stands in for a noun or noun phrase.

Notes

One way of describing the basic structure of a sentence is into a predicate, or event that the sentence is about, and its participants, or the entities that participate in that event:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sentence</th>
<th>predicate</th>
<th>participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She arrived.</td>
<td>arrived</td>
<td>she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen ate a cookie.</td>
<td>ate (a cookie)</td>
<td>Jen, cookie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bear will investigate the trash.</td>
<td>will investigate (the trash)</td>
<td>bear, trash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In SENĆOŦEN, the first thing in the sentence is usually the predicate, while in English the first thing is usually the subject, which is the most important participant:

- **HILEN TŦE BISEJ.**
  - fall the fir cone
  - The fir cone fell.
- **XÁĆEN TŦE ĆICX.**
  - dry the cherry bark
  - The cherry bark is dry
- **XPÁ, TIÁ,.**
  - cedar this
  - This is (red) cedar.
- **John TŦE NE SNÁ.**
  - John the my name
  - My name is John

These examples also illustrate that in SENĆOŦEN, a predicate can be any lexical word, whether a verb (fell), adjective (dry), noun (cedar), or even a name (John). In English, by contrast, only verbs can be predicates. A non-verb in the predicate must be accompanied by a verb like is, as in the phrases is dry, is cedar, and is John.
Another difference between these languages is that in English, a sentence must include an explicit predicate and subject, while in SENĆOŦEN only a predicate is required:

- HILEN.  ‘It fell.’
- XÁĆEN.  ‘It is dry.’
- XPA.  ‘It is (red) cedar.’
- John.  ‘He is John.’

If the subject is a pronoun like ‘I’, ‘we’, or ‘you’, then it is indicated in SENĆOŦEN by a free particle after the predicate (§2.4). These are some important subject markers:

- SEN  sän  ‘I’  →  YÁ SEN ITET.  ‘I’m going to sleep.’
- LTE  álə  ‘we’  →  U TUE SXAŁEŁ LTE.  ‘We are still sick.’
- SW  sxʷ  ‘you’  →  YEYOSEN SW.  ‘You’re playing.’

Object pronouns in SENĆOŦEN are not free particles, but suffixes on the predicate. Compare these subject and object markers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>subject pronouns</th>
<th>object pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEN  sän  ‘I’</td>
<td>-S   -s  ‘me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTE  álə  ‘we’</td>
<td>-OLW  -aləxʷ  ‘us’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW  sxʷ  ‘you’</td>
<td>-SE  -sə  ‘you’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Object pronouns sometimes fuse with other suffixes, such as the transitive suffix -ET. In these data, the SENĆOŦEN transcription indicates how these sentences are pronounced, while the transcription in slashes distinguishes the individual morphemes:

- QENETOLW  SW.  /kʷən-ət-aləxʷ  sxʷ/  ‘You look at us.’
- QENES  SW.  /kʷən-ət-s  sxʷ/  ‘You look at me.’
- QENESE  SEN.  /kʷən-ət-sə  sän/  ‘I look at you.’
- QENES  LTE.  /kʷən-ət-sə  álə/  ‘We look at you.’

Exercises

1. Transliterate these data from Montler (§2.4.4.5) into the SENĆOŦEN alphabet. Then identify the subject of each sentence, and the morpheme that indicates it.

- /ʔətʰŋəstxʷ  sxʷ/.  /ʔitʰ-ŋiy-staxʷ  sxʷ/  ‘You dressed him.’
- /ʔətʰŋəstxʷ  álə/.  /ʔitʰ-ŋiy-staxʷ  álə/  ‘We dressed him.’
- /ʔətʰŋəstxʷ  əs/.  /ʔitʰ-ŋiy-staxʷ-əs/  ‘He dressed him.’