



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Noo poy ngeevichuniq

Langacker, Ronald W.

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42. *Noo poy ngeevichuniq*

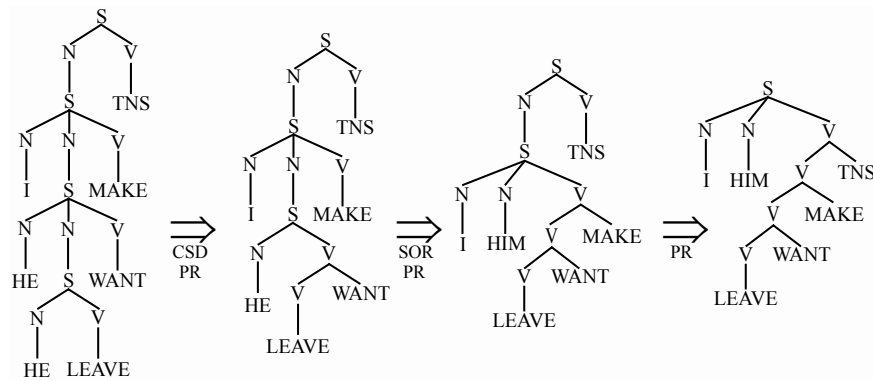
Ronald W. Langacker, University of California, San Diego

It can be argued that a linguist should not have a favorite grammatical construction – that like one’s children, they should all be loved equally. Still, this construction from Luiseño (a Native American language of the Uto-Aztecan family) has been a favored example throughout my career for a succession of different reasons.

The pattern emerged in the one field methods class I ever taught (1970). The verb is a straightforward case of morphological derivation: *Noo poy ngee-vichuu-ni-q* (I him leave-want-make-TNS) ‘I make him want to leave.’ A special point of interest is that the suffixes *-vichuu* and *-ni* can occur in either order with an attendant difference in semantic scope: *ngee-vichuu-ni* ‘make want to leave’ vs. *ngee-ni-vichuu* ‘want to make leave.’ Moreover, the consultant (Villiana Hyde) was happy (and surprised) to accept an extended version: *Noo poy ngee-vichuu-ni-vichuu-q* ‘I want to make him want to leave’. Owing to the transparency of these forms, I used them as the basis for a sample problem in a textbook on linguistic analysis (1972: 76-77).

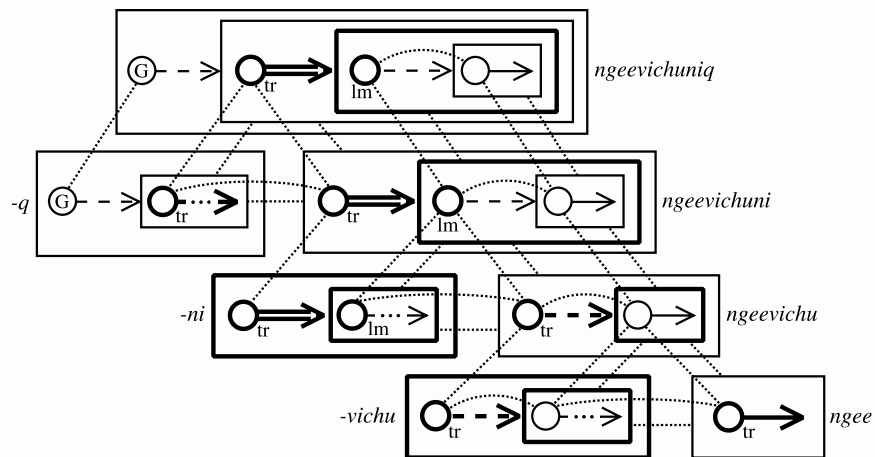
This was the era of generative semantics, where even a simple verb like *kill* was decomposed into elements represented as higher-level verbs in underlying structure: (CAUSE (BECOME (NOT (ALIVE))))). I was naturally led to construe the Luiseño construction as evidence for this sort of decomposition (1973). The generative semantic account required a derivation involving the transformations of complement-subject deletion (CSD), subject-to-object raising (SOR), and successive applications of predicate raising (PR), which combined a lower-level verb with a higher-level one:

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This derivation served to reconcile the presumed semantic (or ‘logical’) representation of sentences like *Noo poy ngee-vichu-ni-q* with their surface form as single-clause expressions with a morphologically complex verb. In a later era (1988), I returned to this construction to show that Cognitive Grammar neatly handles such expressions without resorting to underlying structures and transformations. It is just a matter of explicitly describing the internal semantic structure of each component element as well as the specific correspondences effecting their integration at successive levels of composition. A single symbolic assembly thus accommodates both the form and the meaning of such sentences, including the semantic roles of the verb’s trajector and landmark (expressed as clausal subject and object) at each morphological level:

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Still later (1997: paragraph 7.2), I returned to this construction in making the point that grammatical organization is not limited to well-behaved constituency hierarchies. Rather, it consists in assemblies comprising semantic groupings, phonological groupings, and symbolic links between the two. In this case the construction served a basis for comparison with others that are less well-behaved.

The construction has proved useful yet one more time in preparing this contribution. It will probably not be the last time.

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