Identifying Identificational Sentences in Okanagan Salish

John Lyon
First Nations Language Centre, Simon Fraser University

Abstract:

This talk discusses copular predication in Okanagan, a Southern Interior Salish language. Higgins (1973) develops a taxonomy of English copular sentences (i.e. sentences without a main clause verbal predicate, with an inflected form of the copula 'be') consisting of 4 types: These are predicational, specificational, equative, and identificational. Here are some English examples of each type:

**Predicational:** Tully is a/the bank robber.

**Specificational:** The bank robber is Tully.

**Equate:** The morning star is the evening star.

Cicero is Tully.

**Identificational:** That place is Vancouver.

That is Vancouver.

While analyses of predicational sentences are relatively straightforward, the other three types are much more difficult to define and distinguish from one other, and have in recent years been the subject of much debate (cf. Mikkelsen 2005; den Dikken 2006, among many others). Identificational sentences involve a demonstrative (or demonstrative phrase) in subject position. Depending partially on how one analyzes demonstratives and proper names in a language, identificational may be analyzable as equatives, specificational, or even predicational sentences.

Lyon (2013) claims that there are only two types of copular sentence types in Okanagan, predicational and equative (cf. Heller 2005 for English). The equivalent of identificational sentences in Okanagan pattern on the one hand as predicational (where proper names are predicates), and on the other hand as a truncated form of a cleft, which Lyon (2013) analyzes as equative. I will discuss work which is currently underway to bring new data to light which may definitively classify identificational sentences as either predicational or equative. Theoretical implications include the semantic status of proper names, and the syntactic and semantic relation between copular clauses and cleft structures.