

What makes a classifier a classifier?

– Source constructions and the distinction to nominal roots in the Bolivian Arawak languages –

Anita Obenaus, GK colloquium WiSe2022/23, Goethe University Frankfurt

My research project is concerned with classifiers in the Bolivian Arawak languages. At least four varieties (Mojeño Ignaciano, Mojeño Trinitario, Baure and Paunaka) in this Arawak sub-branch show sets of 14-31 grammaticalized classifiers which can be suffixed to nouns, adjectives, numerals and incorporated into verbs (Danielsen, 2007; Olza Zubiri et al., 2004; Rose, 2019; Terhart, 2022). These classifier suffixes mainly denote the shape or texture of objects.

In the first part of this talk, I will introduce these classifier systems and their characteristic features, namely the multifunctionality of the classifiers and the fact that they can appear in different morphosyntactic contexts (Krasnoukhova, 2012) with examples from Mojeño Trinitario.

The second part of the talk will be concerned with the origin of the classifier systems. It has been hypothesized that classifiers were acquired rather recently in the Arawak diachrony, at the level of individual subgroups (Aikhenvald, 2000). Evidence, such as recently introduced classifiers as well as cross-linguistic data suggest that the classifiers in Bolivian Arawak languages originate in nouns.

Therefore, I will examine the possible source constructions involving nouns (namely compounds and incorporation) which have probably given rise to classifiers. I will then present grammaticalization stages of classifiers based on data from Baure (Danielsen, 2007). In the end, I will present some criteria, which can be used in order to make a distinction between nouns and classifiers in the Bolivian Arawak languages.

References

- Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2000). *Classifiers: A typology of noun categorization devices*. Oxford linguistics. Oxford University Press.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=98425>
- Danielsen, S. (2007). *Baure: An Arawak language of Bolivia*. *Indigenous languages of Latin America (ILLA): Vol. 6*. Research School CNWS.
- Krasnoukhova, O. (2012). *The Noun Phrase in the Languages of South America*. *LOT dissertation series: Vol. 301*. LOT.
- Olza Zubiri, J., Nuni de Chapi, C., & Tube, J. (2004). *Gramática Moja Ignaciana (Morfosintaxis)*. Verbo Divino.
- Rose, F. (2019). From classifiers to applicatives in Mojeño Trinitario: A new source for applicative markers. *Linguistic Typology*, 23(3), 435–466. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingty-2019-0024>
- Terhart, L. (2022). *A Grammar of Paunaka*.