

PRODUCTIVE COMPOUNDING AS A PATH FOR THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NOUN CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

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How noun classification systems develop? In this paper I will present a modest attempt to examine this question in a small part of the grammatical system of an Amazonian language. I will show how a noun classification system little studied but not uncommon in Amazonian languages develops out of **productive noun compounding**. I will also briefly compare this type of noun classification system with the so-called **class terms** found in some South East Asian languages, in particular Thai, and its relevance to linguistic typology. The analysis of the data is initially based on the method of internal reconstruction, and makes use of some notions found in Lakoff (1987), Lakoff and Johnson (1986), Sweetser (1990), Gibbs (1994), Talmy (2000) among others in their studies on metaphor and semantic change. The results will also be compared to some preliminary historical comparative data to assess the historical status of the classification system -- as emerging innovation or retention. The semantic nature of noun classification systems has received much attention in the linguistic literature in terms of their underlying semantic, grammatical and, to a less extent, discourse-pragmatic properties (see Adams 1986, various papers in Craig 1986, Corbett 1991, Aikhenvald 2003, among many others). Less attention, however, has been given to classifying systems also used with more derivation-like functions, where the classifying noun is often used to expand the vocabulary of the language. To illustrate the defining property of these classifying nouns, we can compare it to a typical classifier system such as the Thai (Sino-Tibetan, Thailand) numeral classifiers. In Thai a numeral classifier such as *kon*, used for people, as in *kruu song12 kon* (teacher two CLF) 'two teachers[12=rising tone]', is employed to quantify human referents in discourse. In Apurinã (Arawak, Brazil), a classifying noun such as *tāta* '(tree) bark' can be productively used to derive new lexemes, such as *uky-tāta* (eye-bark) 'eye glasses'.

If we describe the properties of such classifying nouns as mappings from *source* to *target semantic domains*, it is possible to determine which semantic information is being lost or preserved as each classifying noun is used as part of different word forms. Having established source and target domains, then I will present the specific semantic properties being mapped between domains. The results will reveal a system of core semantic properties underlying the various mappings and which *emerges* in terms of *schemas* comparable to those used to motivate metaphors (Lakoff 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 1986, Johnson 1987). Finally, having arrived at the semantic properties underlying the use of classifying nouns in Apurinã, I will compare them to class terms in Thai, and then address the question of the place of such classifying systems in the general typology of classifier systems.

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