

Language contact meets psycholinguistics in Northwestern Amazonia

It has previously been pointed out that there is a striking similarity in both the form and the function of certain valency-changing morphemes in the northern Amazonian region of Peru. Various unrelated languages of the Cahuapanan, Zaparoan and Peba-Yaguan families were found to share an applicative suffix of the form $-tV$. Furthermore, causatives in nearby Witotoan and Arawakan languages were found to have the form $-tV$ as well (Wise 1999). As structural convergence and grammatical borrowing is a well-known feature of northwestern Amazonian contact areas (particularly the Vaupés), this widespread grammatical form is likely indicative of a contact scenario. The apparent borrowing of applicative suffixes in the languages of northern Peru will be the subject of this talk.

First, Wise's claims will be revised and expanded. This phenomenon is even more widespread than Wise (1999) would have it. In addition to the three language families mentioned above, there is yet another, unrelated group of languages, the Jivaroan languages, which also has an applicative with a $-tV$ form. Data for Jivaroan will be drawn from the author's own fieldwork. This observation will strengthen the assumption that this scenario is truly a case of morphological borrowing of valency markers.

However, by inspecting the data more closely a more complex picture emerges. In most of the cases described, the valency marker $-tV$ has an additional function in each language. This alternative function varies substantially from language to language. For example, even though $-ta$ and $-tu$ can have an applicative function in Yagua (Peba-Yaguan) and Shiwiar (Jivaroan) respectively, in Yagua the same morpheme seems to double up as an instrumental, whereas in Shiwiar it can be used as an object marker. These striking differences in function seem to speak against the assumption that the morphemes in question are straightforward borrowings.

Drawing from psycholinguistic literature on phono-semantic priming, this paper will argue that the morphemes discussed are both borrowed and native. I suggest that the similarity (and in many cases identity) in form of valency morphemes in unrelated languages of northern Peru does indeed arise from intense language contact. However, I do not propose that the morphemes themselves were taken directly from one language and transposed into another. Instead, bilingual speakers could have established a link between similar phonological forms which already existed in each of their languages and expanded the use of one of them to overlap partially with the other. In this sense, an

instrumental suffix /-ta/ in one language might have been recruited to do what an applicative suffix /-ta/ did in another purely on the basis of their phonological similarity, resulting in a similar applicative suffix in both languages. This talk will highlight how psycholinguistic insights can advance our understanding of contact-induced change in Amazonia.

References

Wise, M. R. (2002). “Applicative Affixes in Peruvian Amazonian Languages.” In *Current Studies on South American Languages*, ed. Mily Crevels, Simon van de Kerke, Sérgio Meira, and Hein van der Voort, 329–344. Indigenous Languages of Latin America 3. Leiden: CNWS.