

Predicate (verbal) classification in Gumuz: a typological anomaly in Africa? *Category: Oral*

To date, there has been no documentation of predicate (verbal) classifiers in the languages of Africa. In fact, Aikhenvald, in her typology of classifiers, asserts that they simply do not exist on the continent (2000:171). Other typologies of predicate classification only make reference to languages of the Americas and Australia (Mithun 1986, Grinevald 2000). Thus, such a system appears to be at best rare in Africa. However, this paper shows that it exists to a certain extent in Gumuz, a language spoken in the Blue Nile region of Ethiopia, belonging to the Nilo-Saharan family.

Predicate classifiers are classifiers found in the verb stem. These classifiers do not classify the verb itself but rather an argument of the verb (Grinevald 2000:67). As per Mithun, systems of predicate classification develop from incorporated nouns, usually body parts (1986:383). Gumuz incorporates several body parts into the verb, some of which function as predicate classifiers including the following:

Gloss	Free Noun	Incorporated Noun / Predicate Classifier	Semantics of Classified Nouns
'head'	lúk ^{wá}	-V ^{k^w}	<i>entities that are head-like in shape and/or function or closely associated with such objects</i>
'eye'	lícá	-V ^c	<i>entities associated with wounds, fire, small seed-like objects, and outer coverings</i>
'tooth'	k ^w ósa	-ik ^w ós	<i>entities tooth-like in size and/or shape and/or which form groups of identical objects</i>
'ear'	ts'éa	-ts'ê	<i>flat, thin, flexible objects</i>

One other predicate classifier in Gumuz no longer exists as a free noun but clearly has nominal origins; this is the suffix, -V^{ts} 'body':

Gloss	Predicate Classifier	Semantics of Classified Nouns
'body'	-V ^{ts}	<i>the human body, entities associated with the human body or that are functionally or physically body-like (objects longer than they are wide)</i>

Other predicate classifiers found in Gumuz are incorporated possessed forms of the free nouns given in the first chart above. The semantic categories of nouns classified by these incorporated possessed forms sometimes overlap with that of their non-incorporated counterparts. But in at least one dialect (spoken in Mandura), these possessed incorporated nouns form non-overlapping categories of classification as well.

According to the typologies of both Aikhenvald (2000) and Grinevald (2000), Gumuz exhibits characteristics of two types of predicate classification: 1) classificatory noun incorporation (Grinevald's *incorporated classifier construction*) and 2) verbal classifiers as affixes (Grinevald's *verbal classifying affixes*). In sum, Gumuz conforms to existing proposed typologies of noun classifiers developed on the basis of non-African languages, but importantly shows that a Nilo-Saharan language also has predicate classifiers, which thus far has not been described for other languages of Africa.

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (2000). *Classifiers: a Typology of Noun Categorization Devices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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