

Polycategoriality in New Caledonian languages.

Category: oral (as part of Workshop “Typological Perspectives on Polycategoriality”)

In contrast with other Austronesian languages, lexical bases in New Caledonian languages are not pervasively polycategorial; many are unambiguously subcategorised as only nouns, or only verbs (with or without overt morphology), as shown by the existence of various derivational processes. A clear asymmetry appears in the derivation of subcategorised lexical bases with various deverbal, but no denominal affixes; it will be argued that this is due to the basic predicativity of nouns. Polycategorial bases are action or property nouns or (\pm active) intransitive verbs without any formal difference. At what level are their category defined?: as morphosyntactic words?, at syntactic and phrasal level?

It will be shown that categorial fluidity extends to other categories, through recategorisation of lexical bases at syntactic and phrase level, without derivation, grammaticalisation or loss of morphological features. This results in lexico-syntactic words and categorial hybrids. In Nêlêmwa, nominal bases, among them bound nouns, are the most versatile category: they refer to qualities/properties, their semantics also extends to abstract grammatical concepts such as modality, quantification; some of them are only or mostly predicative and have an argument structure.

Iaai *u mwe boŋo-m*
2SG process stop-POSS.2SG
‘you stopped’ (litt. you stop-your). (Ozanne-Rivierre, 1976:208)

Cèmuhî *ε taawö-n pa èwa.* (Rivierre, 1980:72)
3SG transport-his MS the child
‘The child transports him’ (litt. he transport-his the child: the child is his transportation)

Nêlêmwa *Awa-ny nok me fha-ny da Numia.* (Bril 2002: 97)
will-POSS.1SG fish CONJ load-POSS.1SG DIR Noumea
‘I want some fish to bring it to Noumea’ (lit. my will fish for my load to N.)

Kaxaaxa-ny agu hleny.
support-POSS.1SG person this.DEICT
‘I count on this person.’ (lit. this person is my support) (2002: 96)

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