

Word formation in Central Jukunoid languages oral presentation

The Central Jukunoid languages are characterized by morphological loss in different domains of the grammar. While the languages are considered to have had an agglutinative structure at a certain point in their history (Shimizu 1980; Storch 1999), these structures have largely been replaced by isolating structures, i.e. morphemes have largely been replaced by periphrastic constructions. For example, the noun class systems, which can still be found in other Jukunoid languages, e.g. the Yukuben-Kutep group, have been reduced to lexicalized remnants of affixes in the synchronic data, which do no longer mark number and gender.

The aim of the presentation is to discuss the morphological reduction and expansion in word formation in Central Jukunoid languages with a special focus on the southernmost language Mbembe. As mentioned above, the noun class affixes have largely lost their function. A few examples can be found which show that the affixes formerly had a derivational function. As these are no longer productive, the most common means to derive nouns is by compounding, a feature quite prominent in analytic languages (Aikhenvald 2007). Most of the Central Jukunoid languages have developed noun classifiers through a process of grammaticalization (Storch 1999). This expansion in morphology cannot be found in Mbembe.

The morphological means to derive deverbal nouns are more elaborate, but occur to differing degrees in the different languages. There seems to be a gradual reduction from different productive affixes in the H5ne language in the north to similar affixes in the west, which are assimilated to the stem (Storch 1999). In the Mbembe language in the south, only fossilized affixes and conversion occur, i.e. a verb can be used as a noun without any formal changes.

In the formation of verbs a similar phenomenon can be observed: in H5ne, reflexes of a former elaborate system of word formation can be observed in stem internal changes or fossilized suffixes. The productive means of deriving verbs today are compounding and serialization. Again, new structures have been developed through grammaticalization (Storch 1999). In this case, similar constructions can be found in Mbembe as well, but Mbembe shows no reflexes of former morphological devices.

The questions that arise are why does Mbembe not compensate for the loss of derivational morphology by expansion through grammaticalization as other Central Jukunoid languages do? Why have the other Central Jukunoid languages preserved morphological means to derive deverbal nouns while Mbembe did not? Why can hardly any tendency of expansion be observed in the Mbembe language? These questions will be discussed considering language internal as well as language external factors.

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Storch, Anne. 1999. Das Hone und seine Stellung im Zentral-Jukunoid. Köppe: Köln.