

ABSTRACT

A Grammar of the Lokono Predication System

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This dissertation uses a Functional framework to produce a grammar of the verbal predication system of Lokono, an endangered Amerindian language spoken in Guyana. At the core of this system is the way in which, at the level of the morphology and syntax, speakers treat items along the semantic time stability continuum. Items along this semantic continuum belong to two major word classes – one involving items semantically closest to the most time-stable end of the continuum (nouns), and those nearest to the least time-stable end (verbs). In Lokono, the boundary on the semantic continuum between nominal roots and verbal roots is drawn between semi-abstract items and property concept items depicting size, on the other.

The morphological and syntactic behaviour of Lokono predicators group them into three semantic sub-types, PRED₁, active or stative and transitive, PRED₂, active and intransitive, and PRED₃, stative and intransitive. The boundary between PRED₂ and PRED₃ falls inside the class of ‘state of living’ items. This results in the ‘state of living’ predicator /ʌoda/ ‘to die’ being grouped with action predicators, while /kaki/ ‘to live’ is grouped with stative predicators. Each predicator type exhibits a basic unmarked argument structure. However, under the influence the pragmatics of the discourse, argument structures that are atypical for particular predicators, may result in ‘a continuum of transitivity’.

The semantic arguments of predicators are coded in the language either at the level of the morphology via bound pronouns or at the level of the syntax via free pronouns or full noun phrases. Some arguments can be represented at both levels simultaneously, revealing interesting patterns in the constituent order. This seemingly complex relationship between predicators and their arguments is easily explained by the study within a model, which uses as its metaphor the gravitational pull between a planet and its moons.

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