

On Deictic Notions in Three Languages of South America: Verbal Systems

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Deixis, a notoriously challenging semantic domain almost any language, grammatically enters into verbal systems of many South American languages. Yagua (Peba-Yaguan) is located in the Peruvian western Amazon region, and has rich sets of Locational and Movement verb suffixes. Some of these specifically communicate location or movement relative to a point of reference (e.g. ‘action done “across from” point of reference’, ‘action done upriver’ from point of reference’, ‘action while/before moving away, action while/before moving toward, action after arriving), while others are less deictic in meaning (e.g. ‘action enroute’, ‘action done while meandering,’ ‘action done while going directly along’). Some of these affixes appear to be related to (historical and/or synchronic) verb roots (i.e. serial verb or compounding sources), and others to certain adpositions. The meanings inherent in the Yagua Movement suffixes generally adhere to Guillaume’s proposed typology of “Associated Motion”.

Almost the other extreme of the Amazonian territory is the Argentinian Chaco. Here Pilagá (Guaycuruan) and Nivaê (Mataguayan) languages lack well-grammaticalized adpositions (though one may identify relational nouns). However, the languages have verb suffixes that add -- sometimes deictic -- locational, directional and associated motions to events and situations. Unlike in Yagua, at least some of the suffixes appear to have applicative-like functions, allowing additional referents in the clause. The set of associated motion meanings in these Chaco languages distribute differently than is predicted by Guillaume’s (2016) typology of associated motion; thus importantly adding to our understanding of the typology of such systems.