

Diachronic stories of body-part nouns in some language families of South America

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The present paper deals with the diachronic developments of body-part nouns in languages belonging to a sample of language families of South America. The data included in this paper mainly come from Pano and Takana languages, but examples from other genetic units, such as Yanomama, Makú, Tukano and Chibchan, are also taken into consideration in the discussion.

Four diachronic paths associated with body-part nouns are described and illustrated in this paper. Three of them are instances of grammaticalization: i) body-part noun > spatial adposition (Pano, Takana); ii) body-part noun > nominal classifier (Makú, Tukano, Yanomama); and iii) body-part noun > body-part prefix (Pano). While the diachronic paths in i) and ii) are well attested and have been widely described and discussed in the literature (see, for instance, DeLancey 1997; Derbyshire and Payne 1990), Pano body-part prefixes are less common cross-linguistically (see Zariquiey and Fleck 2012). The remaining diachronic path to be illustrated in this paper is a type of lexicalization (see Talmy 2007), which consists in the use of body-part nouns in new lexical entries, usually through interesting metaphoric extensions (Chibcha).

This paper carefully examines these four diachronic paths in detail, elucidating their associated constructions and their different steps. The analysis will show that the same patterns and constructions are found throughout the data: we systematically find that body-part nouns are used in noun incorporation and compounding of different types and these constructions trigger the diachronic paths to be discussed here. The participation of body-part nouns in these different constructions has usually to do with their belonging to a class of inalienably possessed nouns, which seems to be relevant in the grammars of at least some of the languages included in our sample.

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