

Noun incorporation in Bribri (Chibchan, Costa Rica)

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This talk presents a first systematic account of noun incorporation (NI) in Bribri, a Chibchan language spoken in southern Costa Rica on both sides of the Talamanca mountain chain by approximately 13,000 people (Jara Murillo and García Segura 2013). Data for this study come from the only available dictionary of Margery Peña (2005). All data from this source were verified and analyzed together with an expert Bribri native consultant at the Universidad de Costa Rica. Of the 453 active voice verbs contained in the dictionary, approximately 300 (or 66%) are formed by the incorporation of a noun stem to a verb stem. About half of these 300 verbs have constituent stems which are no longer identifiable. The remaining 150 active voice verb forms with synchronically identifiable Noun and Verb stems are the focus of the present talk. Following the classification in Mithun (1984), three types of noun incorporation were identified in the data: Type I “lexical compounding”, Type II “manipulation of case”, and Type IV “classificatory NI”. Instances of incorporating structures that deviate from these three types were also found. These involve (i) semantically idiosyncratic constructions and (ii) transitivity-discord constructions. After describing the morphosyntactic features of each type and their use in discourse, we argue that NI in Bribri is best analyzed as a lexical phenomenon (with syntactic implications) rather than a syntactic one (Saddock 1980; Baker 1988), following the lexicalist approach (Mithun 1984, 1986, 2000, 2010), (Mithun and Corbett 1999), (Anderson 2000).

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