

Morpho-semantic structures of classificatory prefixes in Tinrin and Neku in typological and cognitive perspectives

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This paper presents an analysis of classificatory prefixes found in Tinrin and Neku of New Caledonia, comparing their morpho-semantic structures with similar prefixes seen in other languages of Oceania and North America.

Classificatory prefixes typically indicate the instruments, and modes or manners of action which bring about resultative states as expressed by verb stems. We have found a number of verbal prefixes of this nature in Neku during fieldwork carried out since 2001 to present, which show a remarkable similarity to those attested in Tinrin (Osumi 1995) and other languages in Oceania and North-America in their morpho-semantic features. In this paper we first examine the features seen in Tinrin and Neku, and then compare these cross-linguistically with those in other languages that behave in similar ways, with the goal of clarifying which features most commonly occur, what are the basic semantic concepts underlying the forms, and how we can define classificatory prefixes as distinguished from other types of prefixes or parts of compound verbs.

We will then see how these semantic concepts constitute cognitive patterns. The range of verb stems combinable with these prefixes is also examined, revealing further semantic patterning in terms of superordinate groupings of verb stems. Prefixes and verb stems, once combined in lexical verb forms, interact with each other, and produce an extremely rich range of terms for actions or states, with an interesting expansion of specific meanings.