

Speaking of Other Species in Amazonian Kichwa and Wao Terero

How does language documentation contribute to bio-cultural diversity? In this paper we examine how two indigenous languages from the Ecuadorian Amazon, Wao Terero (Glottocode waor1240) and Amazonian Kichwa (Glottocode orien1242) speak about plants and animals from two convergent perspectives, linguistics and anthropology. There is a particular focus placed on recent research on Wao Terero lexical affixes, which complement the findings of decades long research on Amazonian cultures. In particular, we talk about the nature of lexical overlap in species names. Lexical overlap was once argued to be contrary to cognitive universals. In the last 20 years it has been shown that motivating factors play an important role in language learners' acceptance of overlap (Kalashnikova, Oliveri, and Mattock, 2018). We argue that one such factor is culture. Because Amazonian culture and forests have co-evolved together we will also argue that preserving languages is key to preserving the human-forest relations that have produced and sustain this forest.

Wao Terero contains a closed class of lexical suffixes. They occur on nouns, verbs, adjectives, quantifiers and other words. On non-nominal elements, these suffixes take part in a classifier system (Peeke, 1968). When used with nominals, the suffixes are associated with compound-like meanings. Some examples include *meñe-ka*, 'orange/fruit'; and *onto-ka*, 'pitón fruit', where *-ka* is a lexical affix. But *-ka* is not a morpheme for 'fruit'. When the full system is considered, the suffixes show variability in interpretation. The *-ka* occurs in words for stones (*di-ka*), heads (*o-ka-mo*), eyes (*awin-ka*) and other entities. It may be tempting to typify these as 'round'. Yet, *-ka* is used to refer to non-round objects, which often share properties with other *-ka*-containing items – for instance, a material or use. This indicates that meanings are analogical and multi-dimensional. Given this dynamic polysemy, the suffixes may have overlapping usage. References and names for fruit (*meñe-mo*), eyes (*nata-mo-pa*, 'eye pain'), and more may also use a suffix *-mo*. The choice in usage is driven by both convention and salient associations in a pragmatic context. Elicitation indicates these polysemous domains create lexical overlap in productive noun coinage. The use of the affixes as classifiers reinforces the fact that the noun endings are not coincidental or frozen but are part of a productive system. The evidence in this grammatical enterprise converges with the findings of anthropological research.

In anthropological fieldwork that involves cataloging names of species in Wao Tededo and Kichwa, a great deal of lexical overlap and variability in species naming has been observed. These native systems of classification, far from being less precise equivalents of scientific names, actually embody very different cultural assumptions of how humans are related to other species and how these are related to each other. While the linear system seeks to control variables in order to produce a system of unique identifiers used in the objective study and management of nature, these native systems are less concerned with the control of variables. The same species often has several names that may refer to its social relation to various species, its uses, analogical resemblances or stages of growth. Bird names often evoke sound. Rather than classifying genetic distance they may classify behavioral traits that carry across a plant, bird, and human species.

Lexical overlap is motivated in the grammars of languages like Wao Terero by a multiplicity of culturally salient relationships. These have a ready expressive vehicle found in the lexical suffix system. The overlap is in turn accommodated by a cultural attitude toward designations. The addition of lexical suffix information could be seen as a parallel expressiveness, contextualizing designations within a broader system of relationships where certain connections may be particularly salient at the time of use. Preserving indigenous languages preserves distinctive human patterns of engaging nature which in turn enrich the global human experience of other species and serve as potential resources for new ways of sustainably engaging nature in the future.

Kalashnikova, Marina, Aimee Oliveri, and Karen Mattock (2018). "Acceptance of lexical overlap by monolingual and bilingual toddlers". In: *International Journal of Bilingualism* 23.6, pp. 1517–1530.

Peeke, M. Catherine (1968). "Preliminary Grammar of Auca". PhD. Indiana University.