

Spatial orientation in Nilotic languages and the forces of innovation

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The Nilotic languages are fairly well documented branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum. Recent research revealed that they show a broad scale of semantic categories designating spatial orientation. After investigating spatial categories such as cardinal directions or reference frames and deictic categories such as demonstratives or the deictic verbal morphemes ITIVE and VENTIVE, it became clear, that the creation and retention of spatial categories cannot be generalized across Nilotic. These categories underlie certain external forces. Three of these forces will be discussed here. The first force encompasses geographical aspects like landmarks that influence for example the creation of lexemes for cardinal directions. The second force is language contact – mainly the contact with a European lingua franca – that influences the original spatial category, as can be shown with the use of the reference models SINGLE-FILE MODEL and FACE-TO-FACE MODEL. A third force is language contact with neighbouring African languages which stimulates development of polyfunctionality, as can be demonstrated with the verbal morphemes ITIVE and VENTIVE.