

Topological relation markers and frames of reference in Bena Bena

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This paper presents results of investigations into the coding of topological relationships between spatial objects and frames of reference speakers of Bena Bena, a Papuan language spoken in the Eastern highlands of Papua New Guinea belonging to the Gorokan language family of the Trans-New Guinea phylum, employ.

It focuses on two crucial aspects when investigating the linguistic coding of a spatial scenes: topological relations and reference frames. Topological relations locate a Figure with respect to a Ground, reference frames indicate the perspective from which a spatial scene is viewed. These two aspects inevitably co-occur.

Three reference frames are commonly distinguished: absolute, intrinsic and relative (see Levinson 2003). Languages differ in how readily they make use of the three possibilities or whether they are even available.

Spatial descriptions in Bena Bena are made using a set of locative case clitics which are frequently used in combination with relational nouns denoting intrinsic parts of the Ground, to describe a spatial configuration. These locative clitics are used to distinguish basic spatial concepts including 'on', 'in', 'at', However, a particular clitic cannot easily be assigned to a specific meaning. The intrinsic parts of entities either having names on their own or body part terms are commonly used metaphorically to specify location.

Bena Bena makes use of all common reference frames, even though there is a strong tendency towards the intrinsic frame of reference. The relative reference frame is only used for an object close to the speaker provided no other object of reference is in the picture or available. The absolute reference frame is used only for objects at a far geographical distance

Keywords: Papuan languages, Bena Bena, cognitive linguistics, topological relations, frames of reference