

## Grammatical radial categories in the languages of the Northwest Coast

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The division of the lexicon into specific lexical categories including noun, verb, and adjective is often regarded as universal across the world's languages. However, an areal feature of the Northwest Coast of North America is the seeming nonexistence of lexical categories. In these languages, lexemes that translate as nouns, verbs, or adjectives in Indo-European languages may act as predicates or arguments, as in the following from Straits Salish (Haag 1998):

- (1) swiʔqoał\_ləʔ\_sx<sup>w</sup>  
young.man\_pst\_2s.nom  
'You were a young man.'
- (2) ʔiʔenkwəs\_ləʔ\_sx<sup>w</sup>  
brave\_pst\_2s.nom  
'You were brave.'
- (3) t'ləm\_ləʔ\_sx<sup>w</sup>  
sing\_pst\_2s.nom  
'You sang.'

In these languages, however, certain semantic and morphological evidence exists to indicate that some division of the lexicon occurs. For instance, not all aspect markers are able to attach to all lexemes, and not all lexemes can be possessed. However, lexical categories are still less clearly demarcated than in Indo-European languages, and far less meaningful in the description of the grammars of these languages. A cognitive framework, in which lexical categories can be described in terms of radial categories, is useful in the analysis of the this (Lakoff 1987); it appears that while the lexicons of Indo-European languages can be divided into at least three separate grammatical categories, the lexicons of languages of the Northwest Coast consist of three overlapping categories, each with a separate prototypical subcategory. Prototypicality is determined by a number of semantic features, the most pervasive of which is temporality.

### References

Haag, Marcia. 1998. Word-level evidence for lexical categories in Salishan languages. *IJAL*, V. 64, no. 4. 379-393.