

## Abstract Title: Verbal Tales in the Amazon: Noun-to-Verb Ratio in Shiwiar Narratives

Shiwiar is a so far undocumented Jivaroan language spoken by 1,000 people in the Ecuadorean Amazon. Description and documentation of Shiwiar was begun in 2011, and since then a corpus of spoken discourse in a number of genres has been collected. In this study, the relative frequency of nouns and verbs will be explored in three different genres of spoken Shiwiar: traditional narratives, autobiographical accounts, and procedural explanations.

Previous studies (Seifart et al. 2010; Seifart 2011) have shown that languages vary greatly in their relative frequency of nouns and verbs. While the Tibeto-Burman language Chintang has a ratio of 1:1, Sri Lankan Malay (Austronesian) has double as many nouns as verbs. Seifart (2011) identified argument indexing as a predictor: languages that index arguments extensively on verbs are likely to have a low noun/verb ratio because overt argument realisation is unnecessary in those languages.

Shiwiar has rich verbal morphology and requires extensive indexing of arguments on the verb. Both subject and (speech act participant) object marking are obligatory in finite clauses. Additionally, Shiwiar marks subject (and occasionally object) in subordinate clauses using a complex system of switch-reference. As expected by the findings of Seifart (2011), the relative frequency of verbs in Shiwiar is greater than that of nouns. Preliminary findings even suggest that in some narratives, the noun-to-verb ration approximates 1:2. Shiwiar seemingly can dispense with overtly marked arguments because of its rich verbal morphology.

Seifart (2011) also found that ratios of nouns and verbs in different texts within the same language generally followed a “normal” distribution, and that the effect of genre was negligible. However, this was not the case for one of the languages in his sample, namely Baure, an Arawakan language of Amazonia. This study will also test whether genre influences the relative frequency of nouns and verbs in Shiwiar.

### References:

- Seifart, Frank, Roland Meyer, Taras Zakharko, Balthasar Bickel, Swintha Danielsen, Sebastian Nordhoff, and Alena Witzlack-Makarevich. 2010. Cross-linguistic variation in the noun-to-verb ratio: Exploring automatic tagging and quantitative corpus analysis. Paper presented at the DobeS Workshop “Advances in Documentary Linguistics” Nijmegen, 14-15 October 2010.
- Seifart, Frank. 2011. Cross-linguistic variation in the noun-to-verb ratio: the role of verb morphology and narrative strategies. Poster presented at the Association for Linguistic Typology 9th Biennial Conference, The University of Hong Kong, July 21-24, 2011.