

CASES, DIRECTIONALS AND CONJUNCTIONS IN CHIBCHA¹

Nicholas Ostler
Linguacubun Ltd.
London, England

Abstract

After a brief account of some known features of Chibcha, section 2 surveys the uses of the principal case-marking suffixes of Muisca, also known as Chibcha. Each of these suffixes has an extremely wide range of meanings, apparently derived from (or at least clustering round) the local senses. (Interestingly, there is no special mark for dynamic source: instead, the marker for static locus is used.) The facts are concisely stated in the theory of participant-roles proposed in Ostler 1979.

There is also a large set of complex postpositions, largely derived by combining words for body-parts and the simple case-markers. In 3, these postpositions are set out systematically, and the extent to which non-local postpositions can be derived from local ones is considered. The existence of a small class of pre-verbal adverbials is noted. For the first time, the postpositions listed in Lugo 1619 are identified and interpreted.

Each of the case-markers is also used to form a clause-subordinator: either alone, or followed by the topic suffix *-n..* Section 4 reviews the full set of Chibcha clause subordinators, considers the semantic relationship between the case-marking and complement-marking uses, and compares it with the generalizations proposed on the basis of Tibeto-Burman data by Genetti 1986.

1. Overview of Chibcha Genetics and Syntax

Muisca, also known as Chibcha, is the extinct language spoken in the central altiplane of Colombia, centring on Cundinamarca, at the time of the Spanish conquest, and surviving for some 200 years thereafter. It is known from three extensive missionary grammars (viz Lugo 1619, Quijano Otero 1883, Lucena Salmoral 1967 and 1970, González 1987) which also contain bilingual texts for pastoral use, and (in the case of the last) a Spanish-Muisca glossary. There is also at least one other Spanish-Muisca glossary (Quesada Pacheco 1991).

Chibcha has been reckoned (since Uhle 1890) to be the southernmost known member of the Chibchan family, which among many others includes Tunebo, Kogi and Ika within Colombia, and a number of languages further north in Panama (e.g. Move, Bocotá, Dorasque, Cuna), Costa Rica (e.g. Guatuso, Cabecar, Bribri, Tiribí, Boruca), Nicaragua

