Jeudi 8 décembre (10h00 – 13h00)

Judith Aissen (Université de Californie à Santa Cruz)

Deriving VOS in Mayan: Right edge topics in Tsotsil

All Mayan languages are verb-initial. However, they divide into two groups: a ‘rigid’ group which permits only VSO order and a more ‘flexible’ group which permits both VOS (the more frequent order) and VSO. An unresolved question has been the derivation of the two orders and the relation between them. A recent paper by L. Clemens and J. Coon (‘Deriving verb-initial order in Mayan’, 2016, LingBuzz) proposes that all Mayan languages have basic VSO order, with VOS derived via one (or more) of three possible routes: prosodic incorporation of a ‘light’ O into the phonological phrase containing the verb; Heavy NP Shift of S; and movement of a topical S to a right-edge topic position.

This talk addresses the possibility of a right-edge topic position in Tsotsil, a flexible VOS–VSO language. Drawing on a combination of elicited and naturally-produced data, I present a number of structural arguments for such a position, arguments based on coordination, separability of constituents, and extraction. Having established the strong likelihood of a right-edge topic position in Tsotsil, I compare it with the better known left-edge topic position in this language, from which it differs along various dimensions, and I consider its position within the larger typology of topic positions proposed in Aissen 1992 for Mayan (‘Topic and focus in Mayan’).

Jeudi 8 décembre (14h00 – 17h00)

Roberto Zavala (CIESAS, Mexique)

A morphosyntactic profile of Jitotoltec, an unknown Zoquean language

Until recently, Jitotoltec was an unknown Mixe-Zoquean language of the Zoquean branch spoken by approximately 3000 people in the state of Chiapas, in the southern part of Mexico. The language is unintelligible with the other six known Zoquean languages spoken in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Veracruz: Soteapanec, Tختصيتي تبسط Gulf Zoque, Ayapanec, Chiapas Zoque, San Miguel Chimalapa Zoque and Santa María Chimalapa Zoque.

Jitotoltec shares several features with the North Eastern dialect of Chiapas Zoque (Rayón, Tapalapa, Chapultenango, Pantepec) which not are not found in other Chiapanec dialects. These shared features provide good evidence that historically Jitotoltec was separated from the North Eastern Chiapas Zoque. Unlike other Zoquean languages, Jitotoltec developed modal and non-modal long vowels distinctions: ṽ, ṽ, a different stress pattern, new phonemes, created new allophones for several consonants and developed new phonotactic restrictions and tone distinctions unknown in other Zoquean languages. In comparison to Chiapanec Zoque, Jitotoltec has made several lexical substitutions to common Zoquean cognates, and has made semantic changes in lexical cognates. The noun class system found in Chiapanec Zoque is lost in Jitotoltec. The language developed an innovative alignment system for pronouns and person markers and has made various other grammatical changes in simple and complex clauses.

This presentation will provide an overview of the main features of the language using data from two fully transcribed and glossed texts (polysynthesis, constituent order and its correlations, nuclear serial verb constructions, double marking, hierarchical and inverse alignment, and different types of complex clauses).

Vendredi 9 décembre (10h00 – 13h00)

Marianne Mithun (Université de Californie à Santa Barbara)

Is there a prototypical polysynthesis? An excursion through Mohawk grammatical structures and speakers’ exploitation of them for shaping the flow of information

Often pointed to as an example of prototypical polysynthesis, Mohawk, an Iroquoian language of Northeastern North American, has continually presented challenges to traditional expectations about basic linguistic structures. Here a number of these are explored through examination of spontaneous connected speech. Issues to be discussed include morphologically versus syntactically defined lexical categories, interactions between morphological and syntactic expression (particularly noun incorporation), the nature of definiteness, plurality versus distributivity, purely pragmatically-based constituent order, the prosodic packaging of ideas, and the development through time of negative constructions, complex sentences, and exclamatives.

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