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Spike Gildea, Antoine Guillaume

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Introduction: The evolution of argument coding patterns in South American languages

Spike Gildea

University of Oregon and Collegium de Lyon
Department of Linguistics
1290 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR. 97403-1290
spike@uoregon.edu

Antoine Guillaume

Laboratoire Dynamique du Langage, CNRS & University Lyon 2
14 avenue Berthelot
69363 Lyon Cedex 07
France
antoine.guillaume@cnrs.fr

Abstract

This special issue of *JHL* reconstructs the diachrony of a number of innovations in the coding of argument structure, particularly in the domain of verbal indexation, in four Amazonian language families (Chapacuran, Sáliban, Tukanoan and Tupi). It is one result of an international workshop on “Diachronic Morphosyntax in South American Languages” held in Lyon (France) in 2015, with financial support from the Collegium de Lyon (Institute for Advanced Study) and the LabEx ASLAN of the Université de Lyon. The goal was to encourage methodologically innovative (and more rigorous) historical studies of morphosyntactic patterns in languages or language families of South America. The five papers that compose this collection all demonstrate the viability of syntactic reconstruction, even in languages with little or no written history.

Keywords

syntactic reconstruction; diachronic typology; argument structure; verbal indexation; South American languages

1 Introduction

Recent years have seen exciting advances in historical studies in the indigenous languages of South America: a series of conferences on this topic in the last decade culminated in special issues of the *Boletín do Museu Emilio Goeldi* (Galucio & Muysken 2007) and *International Journal of American Linguistics* (Galucio & Gildea 2010). Also, many of the presentations at the recent Amazonicas conferences in Belém (Brazil, Amazonicas V in 2014; selected papers from the symposium on syntax published in Overall, Vallejos & Gildea, in press),¹ and Leticia-Tabatinga (Colombia and Brazil, Amazonicas VI in 2016),² addressed diachronic components of otherwise synchronic descriptive and analytical topics. Reconstruction of morphosyntactic patterns depends on detailed modern descriptions, which have historically been lacking in South America. Only recently has the quality and quantity of descriptive work in many language families of South America reached the critical mass necessary for historical work in grammatical patterns.

This issue of *JHL* is one result of an international workshop on “Diachronic Morphosyntax in South American Languages”³ held in Lyon (France) on May 28-30, 2015, organized as part of a collaboration on the topic of “Diachronic syntax” between Spike Gildea, Fellow of the Collegium de Lyon (Institute of Advanced Study) between September 2014 and July 2015, and Antoine Guillaume and his research colleagues at the laboratory Dynamique Du Langage in Lyon. The aim of the workshop was to give scholars a venue to propose and then discuss detailed reconstructions of morphosyntactic patterns in a language or language family of South America. The larger goal was to contribute additional exemplars from South America to the body of well-argued reconstructions of specific morphosyntactic domains, and thereby to enrich the pool of examples available for organizing our understanding of the evolution of those domains, i.e., to contribute to the nascent field of diachronic typology.

In addition to utilizing recent improvements in both the quantity and quality of descriptive data available, the workshop also encouraged methodologically innovative (and more rigorous) historical studies of syntax, which first identify cognate constructions across the languages of a given language family, or in different contexts within the grammar of a single well-described language. Having identified such constructional cognates, the papers i) argued for the most likely source construction that could have given rise to the group of cognates, as well as (ii) explained the synchronic differences between cognate constructions by describing further innovations specific to the different modern reflexes of that source. As such, the workshop combined the expanded database of descriptive work with theoretically-driven advances in our ability to identify cognate constructions and reconstruct the source constructions that give rise to them.

During the workshop, 23 presentations were given on most of the major language families of South America (Arawak, Cariban, Jê, Panoan, Tukanoan, and Tupian), as well as some smaller families (Barbacoan, Chapacuran, Guaycuruan, Quechuan, Sáliban, Takanan and Zamucoan). The participants ranged from elders in the field, who have spent their entire careers working with indigenous languages of South America, to recent PhDs and current graduate students, who were applying the latest methods to their field projects. The mix included European, North American, and South American participants, several of whom came directly from their current South American institutions. The presentations dealt with the reconstruction of a fairly wide range of morphosyntactic domains, including person, number and gender indexation on verbs or nominals, pronominal systems, case-marking, valency-changing

¹ <http://www2.museu-goeldi.br/amazonicas/index.php/br/programacao-pt>

² <http://www.humanas.unal.edu.co/amazonicas6/en/schedule>

³ <http://www.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/colloques/DiaSal>

mechanisms, negation, evidentials, purpose clause marking and switch-reference.

2 Papers in this volume

For the current volume, a subset of the papers was selected that focused on the topic of innovations in the coding of argument structure, especially verbal (or auxiliary) indexation. These papers present morphosyntactic reconstructions on languages from two major language families (Tukanoan and Tupi) and two smaller ones (Sáliban and Chapacuran). The different languages are spoken in two distinct regions of Lowland South America (Northwestern and Southwestern Amazonia).

The first two papers, by Chacón & Michael and Bruil, deal with the topic of verbal indexation of subject arguments in the Tukanoan languages, an important family of the Amazonian Northwest, with about 29 languages spoken in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil. In these languages, verbal subject indexation morphemes are noteworthy for their unusually high degree of syncretism, able to conflate, in different configurations, different values of person, number, gender, animacy and TAME.

The paper by **Chacón & Michael**, “**The evolution of subject-verb agreement in Eastern Tukanoan**”, focuses on the languages of the Eastern branch of the family. It reconstructs a paradigm of portmanteau forms that cumulatively encode past/perfective and the person, number and gender of the subject. Of particular interest is the evolution of a cross-linguistically unusual agreement system with a four-way formal contrast between three distinct third-person animate categories (masculine singular, feminine singular, and plural) vs. a single category that combines first person, second person, and 3rd person inanimate. Chacón & Michael put forward a diachronic scenario according to which this latter category began as a non-personal opposition of suffixes expressing past/perfective information, immediately followed in simple clauses by the subject; third person animate demonstrative pronouns, expressing also number and gender, fused with the aspectual suffixes, creating a paradigm of third person animate forms and leaving behind the etymologically simple form for the category composed of all person and animacy values not expressed in one of the fused pronouns.

The paper by **Bruil**, “**The development of the subject marking paradigms in Ecuadorian Siona**”, is concerned with the other, Western, branch of the family and more specifically on the Ecuadorian Siona language. Bruil explores the diachrony of several paradigms of forms which, like the languages of the Eastern branch, conflate the person, number and gender of the subject with the tense of the clause (present, past), but also, in this case the type of clause (assertive, non-assertive and dependent). By observing a number of regularities found within the paradigms, she is able to reconstruct important parts of the genesis of the synchronic forms. In particular, she traces back the origin of certain forms to a nominalizer in different sources constructions ([verb-NLZ COP-SBJ], [VERB-NLZ REP-SBJ] and [VERB-NLZ(-CASE)]). Also, she reconstructs the origin of tense to a suffix that blocked the lenition of the following consonant, which can still be observed synchronically as a difference in the consonant of past and present paradigms.

The next paper, by **Rosés Labrada**, “**The Piaroa subject marking system and its diachrony**”, is also concerned with verbal indexation, this time in a language, Piaroa, from a small language family, Sáliban, spoken around the Colombia-Venezuela border. The paper is concerned with a remarkably complex system of subject marking: depending on verb class and tense, Piaroa verbs can be marked with one of three sets of subject markers; in future tense, a single verb form takes two of these sets of subject markers. This often results in multiple exponence of the person, gender and number features of the subject. After reconstructing that Proto-Sáliban verbs would only index their subject once, whatever the tense, Rosés Labrada

argues that the subject indices in the Piaroa past and present tense constructions, as well as the double subject marking in the future tense, are innovative. He develops a scenario according to which these new constructions arose out of a nominal predication construction with a deverbal noun followed by a copular suffix marked for person and number of the subject. This nominal predication construction, with single subject marking, expanded its use to verbal main clauses, expressing habitual aspect in both the present and past tenses. These innovative copula/subject suffixes then extended analogically to the future tense verb form, adding a second paradigm of subject indexation to the conservative subject indexation already used with future verbs.

With the fourth and fifth papers, we move to Southwestern Amazonia. The paper by **Birchall, “Historical change in reported speech constructions in the Chapacuran family”**, explores the history of a future construction in Moré, one of the four Chapacuran languages spoken in the vicinity of the Brazil-Bolivia border. This construction is particularly interesting because its verbal indexation contains an extra morpheme homophonous with first-person subject agreement and it also has optional case-marking on the object, creating a tense-based split in case-marking, in contrast to the absence of case in the other (non-future) clause types in Moré. Examining the comparative evidence, Birchall further shows that no other Chapacuran language contains either of these features in any clause type, future or non-future. This anomalous Moré future construction reconstructs to a reported speech construction that was functionally expanded to express intention and cognition, from which it was reanalyzed as a monoclausal tense-aspect construction, initially expressing imperfectivity and ultimately future tense.

The final paper, by **Galucio & Nogueira, “From object nominalization to object focus: the innovative A-alignment in the Tuparian Languages (Tupian Family)”**, investigates the development of an object focus clause construction in the Tupari branch of the Tupi family, spoken in the Brazilian state of Rondonia, near the Bolivian border. The object focus construction displays an argument structure (A indexed on the verb, O expressed by an unmarked free pronoun/NP) that is the reverse of that of basic transitive simple clause constructions (O indexed on the verb, A expressed by an unmarked free pronoun/NP). After presenting evidence for its innovative nature, Galucio & Nogueira argue that the object focus construction has its origin in a cleft construction that contains an object nominalization, which itself reconstructs to Proto-Tupari. In Tupari and Wayoro, the indexed possessor (notional A) of the nominalization construction was reanalyzed as the A argument of the focus clause, the free possessee (notional O) as the O argument, and the object nominalizing prefix as a focus marker.

A common theme that runs through these reconstructions is that many sources of innovations in verbal argument structure in South America come from reanalyses of nonfinite, usually nominalized, verb forms in biclausal constructions, often as the predicates of matrix predicate nominal constructions. Copular auxiliaries become innovative tense-aspect affixes (Ecuadorian Siona) or subject indices (Piaroa), innovative person-marking comes from the grammar of possession (Tuparian) or the agglutination of adjacent free pronouns (Eastern Tukanoan). In the Moré future, the innovative argument structure follows from a different biclausal source construction, a quoted speech clause. While the innovative argument structure properties are generally inherited directly from their sources, after reanalysis, other changes in the grammar of the distinct biclausal source constructions shows that they have become monoclausal. More generally, these papers all attest that syntactic reconstruction is possible, even in languages with little or no written history; such cases can, in turn, inform our understanding of diachronic typology by identifying new sources for innovations in the grammar that codes argument structure.

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