IP 05, University of Zurich
"Mapudungun and Blackfoot: inverse morphology and three-participant clauses"

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Aims and objectives
This individual project will directly contribute to the first and third topics at the center of attention of the overall CRP, viz. uncovering the factors that have shaped a present-day morphosyntactic make-up sensitive to referential hierarchies in particular languages and the way the latter sensitivity operates in three-participant clauses in these languages. Such a contribution will stem from in-depth studies of morphological, syntactic and discourse patterns in the light of the direct-inverse opposition in two different but complementary realms: Mapudungun and Algonquian.

Mapudungun is a language isolate currently spoken by a relatively large number of people (approx. 150,000) in Chile and Argentina, on which the PI has conducted fieldwork over the last decade. Even though the handful of dialects of Mapudungun are rather similar, there appears to have been an evolution in the verbal agreement system since the language was first described in 1606 that bears intimate relation to the role played by referential hierarchies; the inverse morphology of finite verbs has been restructured in the course of the last four centuries, as has the make-up of some nonfinite verb forms. The objective of the project with respect to Mapudungun is threefold: (i) to identify discourse factors that play a significant role in the direct-inverse clause opposition that may have hitherto gone unnoticed; (ii) to investigate the extent to which the claim made in the literature (Arnold 1997, Zúñiga 2006) as to the syntactic correlates of morphological inversion are empirically robust, and (iii) to obtain a clear picture of how inversion interacts with the rest of the morphosyntax in three-participant clauses. The latter objective will be pursued in cooperation with PI Nr. 4 (Anna Siewierska).

By contrast, Algonquian constitutes a large family of relatively small languages spoken across Canada and the United States, many of which have received attention only during the last century. Despite (sometimes substantial) phonological and lexical divergence between different languages, the direct-inverse and the proximate-obviative oppositions are traits shared by all languages. Even though there have been studies on individual aspects of three-participant clauses in particular Algonquian languages, this still is a largely unexplored area from a comparative perspective. By a similar token, there are details of syntactic and discourse patterns shown by the direct-inverse opposition in Blackfoot, one of the most divergent languages of the family, that deserve more attention in order to arrive at a more thorough understading of inversion and obviation in Algonquian. This language further appears to consist of distinct regional varieties, and this project will hopefully shed light on the same three questions mentioned above for Mapudungun, in addition to providing a clearer picture as to dialectal differences.

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