Workshop: “Obsolescing grammars: the effects of language ecology on language structure”

(16 May 2017, Institut des Sciences de l’Homme, Lyon)

Program

9:00  Roberto Zariquey & Antoine Guillaume: Introduction

9:15  Pilar Valenzuela (Chapman Univ., USA) [Visioconférence]
Standing like a tree: Structural changes in obsolescing Shiwilu

10:00 Roberto Zariquey (Collegium de Lyon & Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú)
“Grammatical obsolescence” in Iskonawa: teasing apart language contact, loss of language skills and conservative structures

10:45 Coffee break

11:00 Antoine Guillaume (DDL)
A preliminary investigation of the possible effects of obsolescence on the grammatical structure of Reyesano (Takanan family, Amazonian Bolivia)

12:00 Lunch

14:00 Natalia Aralova (DDL) & Brigitte Pakendorf (DDL)
Phonetic variation in Negidal: sociolinguistic and contact situation

14:45 Michel Bert (DDL)
Contacts between related languages and obsolescence: Occitan, Francoprovençal and French in the Pilat

15:30 Coffee break

15:45 Discussion
Abstracts

Pilar Valenzuela
*Standing like a tree: Structural changes in obsolescing Shiwili*

Abstract forthcoming...

Roberto Zariquiey
*“Grammatical obsolescence” in Iskonawa: teasing apart language contact, loss of language skills and conservative structures.*

The question about the effects of language death on grammatical structure has been previously dealt with in various studies (see, for instance, Campbell and Muntzel 1989, and Palosaari and Campbell 2011). Obsolescing languages are often described as exhibiting variation and variability; overgeneralization of structural categories; phonological, morphological and syntactic reduction; preference for analytic constructions; and stylistic shrinkage. Although Iskonawa (an obsolescing Panoan language spoken in Peru by approximately six elderly people) largely fits this prototype, I consider that it is problematic to simply attribute the grammatical features of the language to obsolescence. In this talk, I propose a different approach to Iskonawa grammar in which those features that are potentially related to obsolescence are assessed and explained individually. It turns out that it is possible to attribute some of these features to more specific causes, such as language contact with Shipibo-Konibo and loss of language skills due to lack of use. Furthermore, some other features supposedly related to obsolescence are indeed retentions of a state of the language previous to the intense contact with Shipibo-Konibo that resulted in the current obsolescence of the language. Based on the Iskonawa case, I propose that talking about general obsolescing effects may be problematic and that it may be more explanatory to tease apart the different aspects of language death and explore their potential effects on language structure independently.

Antoine Guillaume (DDL)
*A preliminary investigation of the possible effects of obsolescence on the grammatical structure of Reyesano (Takanan family, Amazonian Bolivia)*

Reyesano (a.k.a. Maropa) is a moribund language of the Amazonian Lowlands of Northern Bolivia. It belongs to the small Takanan language family, together with Araona, Cavineña, Ese Eja and Tacana. Within the Takanan family, Reyesano is at the same time the most critically endangered language (ca. 12 speakers, all > 60 years old), and structurally the most deviant language, with an important range of phonological, morphological and syntactic features that are not found in the other languages. For one thing, a number of deviant features make Reyesano simpler than the other Takanan language (e.g., absence of case marking, restricted number of verbal affixes, no category of dual, near absence of dependent clauses markers). For another, other features make the language more complex (e.g., phonological distinction between /ɾ/ and /l/, indexation of SAP in the verb, two distinct possessive constructions). The paper is an attempt at disentangling which of the structural changes might be the result of the relatively recent loss of language vitality (since the 1950s) and which might have occurred in more an-
cient times when the language was fully viable. The study is based on firsthand fieldwork data collected between 2004 and 2008.

**Natalia Aralova (DDL) & Brigitte Pakendorf (DDL)**
*Phonetic variation in Negidal: sociolinguistic and contact situation*

Negidal is a moribund Tungusic language of the Amur region, Russia, spoken by only a handful of elderly women. Working on the documentation of this language we observe striking variation in its lexicon, primarily in vowels. At first glance, one could assume that this is due to the obsolescence of the language. However, we will show that this particular variation was attested already about a hundred years ago when the language was not yet endangered. We will discuss several factors which could cause this phenomenon, such as community size and the contact situation, without being able to offer a conclusive explanation yet.

**Michel Bert (DDL)**
*Contacts between related languages and obsolescence: Occitan, Francoprovençal and French in the Pilat*

Abstract forthcoming…