Morphosyntactic misfits

Clitics, particles, and non-canonical affixes in the languages of the Americas

Venue: Auditorio de Humanidades

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) - Lima

Dates: 23-25 July 2018

Workshop languages: English, Spanish and Portuguese

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In the traditional, dichotomic division of coding systems in language between morphology and syntax, linguistic units are ideally either morphological or syntactic in nature. This perspective on linguistic organization has generated a vast literature in which linguistic units are classified as one or the other based on checklists (see e.g. Dixon & Aikhenvald 2002, Haspelmath 2011 for discussion). The main idea expressed in those checklists is that relations between units in a morphological construction are tight and rigid, whereas relations between units in a syntactic construction are loose and flexible.

It has been recognized by many scholars for a long time (e.g. Dixon 1977, Zwicky 1977) that the dichotomic approach is problematic in that there are many elements that do not fit

neatly into one of the two categories. This is mainly due to the fact that rigidity and tightness are measured across different dimensions (Bickel 2007). A prototypical morphological element, for instance, is often described as having the following characteristics, that span a variety of dimensions.

· lexically restricted host selection
· phonological interaction with host (prosodic, morphophonological)
· morphological interaction with host
· rigid positioning with respect to its host
· non-manipulable by syntax

Because of this multi-dimensionality, even if we can define prototypical or idealized morphological and syntactic units, elements can deviate from these idealizations in many ways (see e.g. Anderson 2006, Spencer & Luís 2014, Van Gijn & Zúñiga 2016, Bickel & Zúñiga 2017). This has led to considerable terminological confusion, in which elements with similar behavior are classified differently and elements with different behavior are classified in the same way. Testimony to the terminological confusion are, furthermore, the many different terms that have been proposed for these "morphosyntactic misfits", which include simple clitics, special clitics, phrasal clitics, phrasal affixes, non-cohering affixes, Wackernagel clitics, Wackernagel affixes, clause-final particles, clause-initial particles, Wackernagel particles, etc.

For the Americanist descriptive tradition, with its many (poly)synthetic languages this problem is particularly relevant, and likely to frustrate fruitful morphological comparison across languages. At the same time, South American languages can be highly informative to shaping our ideas of the possible variation within this group of so-called morphosyntactic misfits (see e.g. Van Gijn & Zúñiga 2014). In this workshop, therefore, we call for papers that, rather than trying to classify elements, focus on highlighting the parameters of variation within a language or across languages.

Questions we would like to address include the following (although they are not restricted to this list):

● Is the dichotomic distinction between morphological and syntactic elements sufficient to describe the variation of morphosyntactic units of a language or language family?
● To what extent are notions such as "word", "affix", "clitic", "particle" useful for comparative or descriptive purposes?
● What parameters are required to describe the variation among morphosyntactic units in a language or language family?
● How are these parameters distributed over different elements in a language or language families?
● How do properties of morphosyntactic units evolve diachronically?
● How do properties of morphosyntactic units interact with their borrowability?
● What inconsistencies are found in descriptions of morphosyntactic units across languages and how can they be reconciled?

Please send your abstract to misfitslima2018@gmail.com before **15 April 2018**. Notification will be given on 25 April 2018.

References

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