**Vous êtes cordialement invités à une**

communication dans le cadre du Séminaire du CRLAO sur les

**« Recherches actuelles en linguistique»**

présentée par

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**«Rethinking the Typology of Split Ergativity»**

**The Patchwork Quilt of Synchronic and Diachronic Syntax**

**le mercredi 25 mars 2015**

**de 16h à 18h**

**INaLCO**

**Salle des Plaques**

**2, rue de Lille**

**75007 Paris**

**Abstract**

When a language has some ergative alignment pattern, it is usually found in only a subset of grammatical contexts, creating what has been called split ergativity. In one common pattern, tense-aspect-based split ergativity, ergative alignment occurs only in past tense or perfective aspect clauses, while some other alignment occurs elsewhere (Dixon 1994). Theoreticians have tried to explain these splits as a grammatical expression of abstract notions like viewpoint, transitivity, inherent agentivity, and ontological salience. In recent research, we have discovered that multiple languages from the Cariban and Jê families (spoken in northern and central South America) present the opposite pattern, in which ergative alignment occurs only in nonpast and imperfective clauses. Trivially, such facts contradict the putative universal about split ergativity; less trivially, they call into question the proposed explanations for that universal. This talk proposes to explain both the universal and counter-universal patterns with reference to the concrete details of historical processes that create individual clause types with their distinct alignments (cf. Gildea 2012).

The metaphor of “split” ergativity (or any other form of “split” alignment) encourages us to misconceptualize the phenomenon as a kind of “surface” division of some “deeper”, somehow fundamentally unified phenomenon. However, the evolution of such alignments suggests a completely different metaphor, that of a patchwork quilt: different constructions (with their different alignment) are like new patches added to the existing quilt of main clause grammar. This metaphor derives from the evolution of “splits”, but it also helps to frame the synchronic analysis of such alignments in a more useful way. This sort of explanation illustrates the potential of diachronic typology, both to help us understand the prevalence of typological universals (without lamenting the discovery of counter-examples) and to bring a new perspective to explanations of these universals (and their counter-examples).

Dixon, R M W. 1994. *Ergativity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gildea, Spike. 2012. Linguistic Studies in the Cariban Family*.* *Handbook of South American Languages*, ed. by Lyle Campbell and Veronica Grondona, 441-494. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

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Les séminaires du CRLAO sont organisés par Hilary Chappell (CRLAO-EHESS) commenceront le 14 janvier 2015 et se dérouleront les mercredis du 16h à 18h jusqu’en fin juin.

Pour toute information complémentaire, veuillez contacter Hilary Chappell sur [hmchappell@gmail.com](mailto:hmchappell@gmail.com" \t "_blank) ou au CRLAO, 131 bd St Michel,  M. Hugues Feler au [01 53 10 53 71](tel:01%2053%2010%2053%2071" \t "_blank).