

(De-)constructing classes: a typological-historical approach to verbal inflection in Mixtec languages

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In this talk I present the design principles, theoretical background, and applications of a multi-variety database of verbal inflection in Mixtec, a language family of southern Mexico. Mixtec is part of the larger Mixtecan family, which is one of the primary branches of Otomanguean. Otomanguean languages are well-known for their complex verbal inflectional class systems in which segmental and tonal exponents cross-cut and complement each other (Bearman et al. 2019, Campbell 2017, Palancar 2016). There now exists numerous language-specific descriptions of these systems, as well as an online data base covering 20 Otomanguean languages (Feist et al. 2015). What is less well studied is the diachrony of these inflectional class systems across verb roots and between languages.

I am developing a database of Mixtec verb forms with an annotation schema that takes into account cognacy and tonal as well as segmental alternations in the marking of aspect-mood. This database thus allows for direct comparison between varieties and can be used to address a multitude of questions, such as the reconstruction of aspect-mood marking, the development of tonal markers, and the distribution of inflectional classes over time.

While certain aspects are language-family-specific, the overarching design and methodology can easily be adapted to other language families and thus contribute to our cross-linguistic understanding of inflectional classes and the processes that shape them.

References

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