

Towards a diachronic account of grammatical tone in Mixtec

Even though about half of the world's languages are tonal, i.e. they make use of pitch to differentiate lexical and/or grammatical forms, tone is still understudied. This is especially true for diachronic processes and tone changes apart from tonogenesis (i.e., the emergence of tonal contrasts). In this talk, I present an overview of ongoing research on the reconstruction of grammatical tone in Mixtec, a large group of Otomanguean languages spoken in southern Mexico. Tone in Mixtec carries a high functional load in lexicon and grammar and has to be reconstructed to Proto-Mixtec and beyond (most likely all the way back to Proto-Otomanguean). This makes these languages particularly suited for the synchronic and diachronic study of tone in general and the relationship of grammatical and lexical tone with other linguistic subsystems. The talk will cover the reconstruction and outstanding issue of lexical tones and present some preliminary findings on the reconstruction of grammatical tone with a focus on the dynamics of verbal aspect-mood marking. I also situate these findings in a broader context of tone typology and diachrony and explore what we can learn from grammatical tone about morphosyntax more generally.