

Differential argument marking – a cross-linguistic study of areality

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Although differential object marking has been studied for at least three decades from a functional-typological point of view, there is shortage of investigations that pay attention to it using balanced cross-linguistic samples. This is rather surprising given the fact that there are many typological studies devoted to case marking in general (e.g. Comrie 2005; Bickel and Nichols 2008). The only exception may be Maslova and Nikitina's (2007) recent attempt at modeling historical changes of alignment patterns by a probabilistic model. In their 400 language sample, approximately 50% of languages had case marking, and about 30-40% (depending on sampling technique) of the case-marking languages had differential case-marking. However, their goal was to model historical changes in alignment patterns, not to scrutinize the areal distribution of differential argument marking.

My purpose in this presentation is to present results of a pilot study that scrutinizes areal patterns of differential argument marking, especially that of differential object marking. On one hand, case marking in general has been shown to diffuse areally and to be especially frequent e.g. in Eurasia and Australia but relatively infrequent e.g. in Africa and the Americas (Bickel and Nichols 2008). On the other hand, there is a clear universal tendency to develop and maintain case marking in verb-final languages (Bickel 2008). My purpose is to investigate whether differential argument marking has a different areal distribution from consistent argument marking and if yes, what linguistic or historical factors may have contributed to it. If no notable differences are found, we may assume that both differential and consistent argument marking are about equally (un)likely to diffuse areally. At this stage of research, I will not pay attention to the semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic factors affecting differential argument marking but merely contrast differential marking with consistent marking. Data for this pilot study comes from a genealogically and areally representative sample of about 120 languages.

References

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