University of Zurich[UZH]

University Research Priority Program
Language and Space

Linguistic Morphology in Time and Space (LiMiTS)

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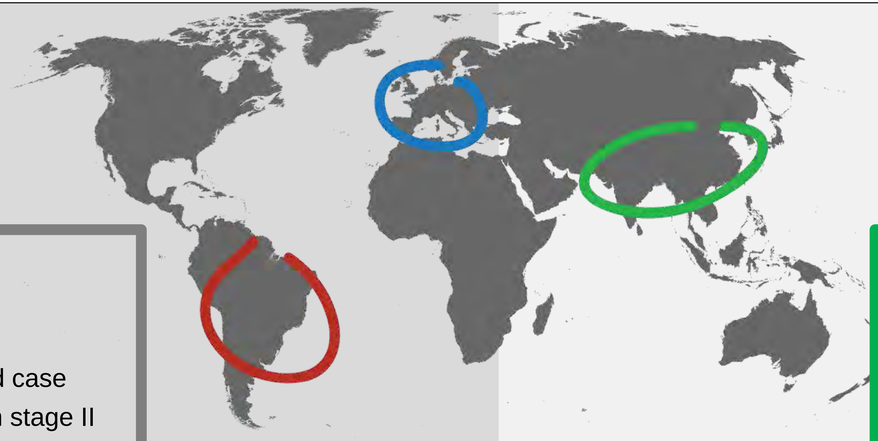
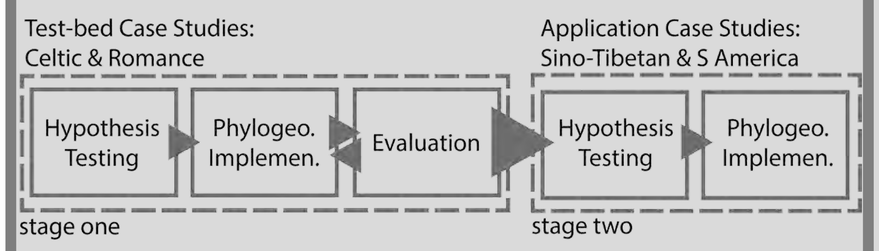
Research question: How does morphology develop in different genealogical and geographical contexts and to what extent is this development affected by language contact?



Methods

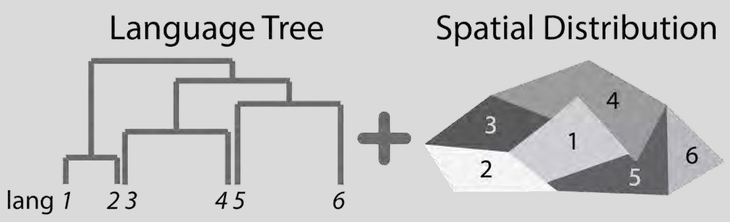
Framework

In a first stage, we focus on well-studied languages (test-bed case studies). The insights gained in this first stage will be used in stage II to work on the application case studies:



Phylogeography

The methodological centerpiece is a combination of phylogenetic methods (i.e. language trees) and a spatial distribution model to estimate spatio-temporal language evolution (i.e. phylogeography):



Morphological focus

In order to increase comparability, we focus on verbal morphology, particularly on person marking, valency and voice markers, and tense-aspect-mood marking.

Morphological theory

A major challenge is the development of theoretically informed analyses that capture the actual variation in morphology. This includes moving away from pre-conceived gross types (e.g. “isolating”, “agglutinating”, “inflecting”, etc.), towards a multivariate, probabilistic, and bottom-up approach. Revising and refining existing typologies of morphological structure will be an important aspect of the project.

Sino-Tibetan

Genealogical and geographical context

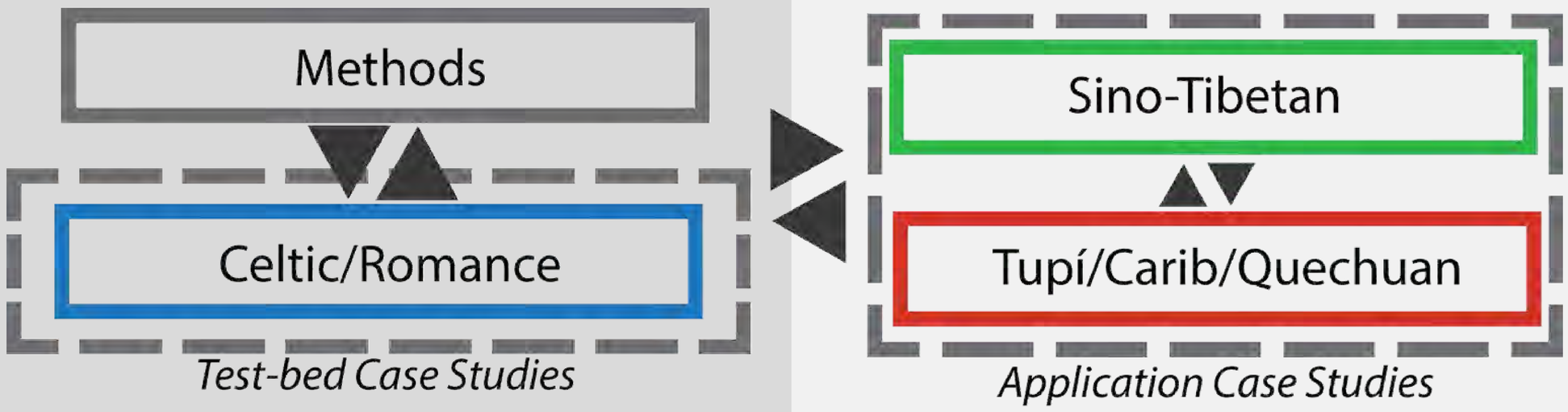
Sino-Tibetan is a large family of some 500 languages which are spoken in a vast contiguous area from China through Southeast Asia, North and Northeast India, Bhutan and Nepal, with westernmost members in Northern Pakistan.

Contact

Various languages of the family have been in long-term contact with other language families, including Tai-Kadai, Austronesian, Austroasiatic, Hmong-Mien, Indo-European, Mongolic, Tungusic, Turkic, Japonic, and Koreanic.

Issues in diachronic morphology

Sino-Tibetan languages exhibit considerable internal diversity in the verbal morphology, with a tendency towards highly complex paradigms in the Western languages and predominantly isolating structures in the East. The question of whether the Sino-Tibetan proto-language displayed complex verbal morphology or not remains one of the most debated issues in Sino-Tibetan linguistics to the present day.



Celtic/Romance

Genealogical and geographical context

Insular Celtic is the (unattested) ancestor of Irish and British, which are spoken in Great Britain, Ireland, and Brittany.
Romance is a family of global extension found on almost every continent in the world. The focus here is on European varieties.

Contact

For Insular Celtic languages, contact with Germanic, Italic, and Romance languages has been attested at different points in time. Contact situations for different varieties of the Romance family, e.g. with Semitic, Slavic, Germanic, Greek, have been reported in the historical literature.

Issues in diachronic morphology

Insular Celtic languages show evidence of retention and development of clitic systems, as well as of morphological reduction.
Across Romance one finds a huge range of variation
both in terms of reshaping of the verb paradigms (e.g. the rise of new tense/mood values) and of the structure of the clitic systems.

Subthemes

Three workshops will be organized around subthemes that target subquestions in the project.

Grammar versus lexicon

The focus is on differences and similarities in which lexicon and morphological structure react to contact in space over time.

Matter versus pattern

Here we focus on two different ways in which languages can be influenced by language contact and the conditions that promote or inhibit these different types of contact-induced change.

Geography and structural patterns in morphology

The goal is to assess the extent to which GIScience methods uncover and classify historical processes that result in particular distributions of patterns.

International partners

EHESS, Paris (France), Museo Paraense Emilio Goeldi Belém (Brazil), Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands), University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), University of Oxford, (UK), University of Oregon (USA), University of Patras (Greece), University of Uppsala (Sweden)

Tupí/Carib/Quechuan

Genealogical and geographical context

Tupí is a family with about 70 attested languages spoken across Brazil and adjacent areas in neighboring countries.
Carib languages are spoken in the north of South America and southwards into central Brazil.
Quechuan languages are spoken in Western South America, mainly in the Andean mountain range from south-west Colombia to northern Argentina.

Contact

Due to their large geographical extensions, all three families present a variety of contact situations with languages from many different affiliations, such as e.g. Arawak, Macro-Gê, Matacoan, Guaycuruan, Nambikwaran, Panoan, Jivaroan, Tacanan.

Issues in diachronic morphology

Morphological profiles of Tupian languages range from fairly isolating to synthetic, the latter especially found in the Tupí-Guaraní branch. Northern Quechuan languages tend to be morphologically poorer, at least in their person marking system. Person markers in Cariban languages show a highly diverse functional range.

FNSNF

Linguistic Morphology in Time and Space is a SNSF Sinergia project