

(Last updated: 12 May 2017)

## **Workshop: “Obsolescing grammars: the effects of language ecology on language structure”**

<b>Date:</b>	16 May 2017, 9:00 am -16:30 pm
<b>Venue:</b>	Institut des Sciences de l’Homme 14 avenue Berthelot 69007 Lyon
<b>Workshop languages:</b>	English and French
<b>Organizers</b>	Roberto Zariquiey Collegium de Lyon Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú  Antoine Guillaume Laboratoire Dynamique Du Langage

### **Workshop description**

In his review of Schmidt’s (1985b) book on the grammatical effects of language death among young speakers of Dyirbal, Muysken (1986) argued that further research was needed to truly understand “the general properties of language death and attrition”. Muysken regretted that Schmidt’s focus on grammatical description was not accompanied by a more explanatory understanding of the relationship between the functions and the structural properties of obsolescing languages. More than thirty years after the pioneering research by Dorian (1980 and 1981), Hill (1983), Dressler (1981); Andersen (1982), and Schmidt (1985a and 1985b) the question about the general effects of language obsolescence on language structure has not been fully answered. Widely cited attempts to offer a systematic response to this question (Campbell and Muntzel 1989 and Palosaari and Campbell 2011) present interesting examples, but fail in teasing apart the obsolescence effects from other types of factors, such as bilingualism, imperfect transmission, positive/negative attitudes or general patterns of language change. What these studies present is a general illustration (mostly phonological) of how some obsolescing languages have changed. There is no a truly explanatory account of the potential effects of obsolescence on language structure. Linguists working on obsolescing languages may have strong intuitions about which grammatical features might be attributed to obsolescence, but none of such features is either exclusive of obsolescing languages or attested in all of them.

This is not surprising since obsolescence is not an unitary phenomenon. Obsolescence situations (or ecologies) may vary significantly (see Grenoble 2011 for a summary) and

this also applies to the speakers of obsolescing languages, who may exhibit drastically different sociolinguistic backgrounds and language skills (Grinevald and Bert 2011). Assuming obsolescence as a single phenomenon obscures the multiplicity of implicated factors and prevents descriptive linguists and typologists from finding potential associations between more specific sociolinguistic variables and patterns/rates of language change in obsolescence situations. In the framework of these ideas, the present workshop puts together a list of case studies on obsolescing languages, focusing on both the grammatical and sociolinguistic characteristics of the processes through which these languages are falling into disuse.

We welcome talks on one or more obsolescent language/dialect/language family. Talks may take into consideration (some of) the topics and issues listed below:

- (1) A general introduction to the language/dialect/family under study.
- (2) An assessment of the endangerment situation of the language/dialect/family under study, discussing (some of) the following factors (UNESCO (2003, Grenoble 2011):
  - intergenerational transmission;
  - absolute number of speakers;
  - proportion of speakers within the total population;
  - trends in existing language domains;
  - response to new domains and media;
  - materials for language education and literacy;
  - governmental and institutional attitudes and policies, including official status and use;
  - community members' attitudes toward their own language; and
  - amount and quality of documentation.
- (3) A discussion of the language contact situation.
- (4) A general characterization of the speakers of the dialect/language/family under study in terms of Grinevald and Bert's (2011) typology: fluent speakers, semi-speakers, terminal speakers, rememberers, ghost speakers and neo-speakers.
- (5) A general typological profile of the language accompanied by a discussion on whether or not the dialect/language/family exhibits features that have been attributed to obsolescing languages in the literature (Campbell and Muntzel 1989 and Palosaari and Campbell 2011). The list of such features often includes:
  - variation and variability;
  - overgeneralization;
  - phonological, morphological and syntactic reduction;
  - acts of reception (calques from the dominant language);
  - development of analytic constructions; and
  - stylistic shrinkage.
- (6) Some conclusions.

**For further information and talk proposals, please contact Roberto Zariquiey ([rzariquiey@pucp.edu.pe](mailto:rzariquiey@pucp.edu.pe)) and/or Antoine Guillaume ([antoine.guillaume@cnrs.fr](mailto:antoine.guillaume@cnrs.fr)) before May-5<sup>th</sup> 2017.**

## References

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