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## **Syntactic Ergativity in Q'anjob'al Mayan**

**Dr. Jessica Coon, McGill University**

**Friday, February 10**

**Room LA B149**

**2:30-4:00pm**

Many morphologically ergative languages show asymmetries in the extraction of core arguments: while absolutive arguments (transitive objects and intransitive subjects) extract freely, ergative arguments (transitive subjects) cannot. This falls under the label “syntactic ergativity” (see e.g. Dixon 1972, 1994; Manning 1996). Extraction asymmetries are found in many languages of the Mayan family, where in order to extract transitive subjects (for focus, questions, or relativization), a special construction known as the “Agent Focus” (AF) must be used. These AF constructions have been described as /syntactically transitive/, because they contain two non-oblique DP arguments, but morphologically intransitive because the verb appears with only a single agreement marker and takes an intransitive status suffix (Aissen 1999; Stiebels 2006).

In this talk--which presents collaborative work with Pedro Mateo Pedro and Omer Preminger--I offer a proposal for (i) why some morphologically ergative languages exhibit extraction asymmetries, while others do not; and (ii) how the Mayan AF construction circumvents this problem. I adopt recent accounts which argue that ergative languages vary in the locus of absolutive Case assignment (Aldridge 2004, 2008a; Legate 2002, 2008), and propose that this variation is present within the Mayan family. Based primarily on comparative data from Q'anjob'al and Chol, I argue that the inability to extract ergative arguments does not reflect a problem with properties of the ergative subject, but rather reflects locality properties of absolutive Case assignment in the clause. I show how the AF morpheme /-on/ circumvents this problem in Q'anjob'al by assigning case to internal arguments. Evidence will come from reflexive and extended reflexive constructions, incorporated objects, embedded clauses, as well as hierarchy effects in related K'ichean languages.

**Dr. Jessica Coon is Assistant Professor and Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at McGill University. She received her PhD from MIT in 2010. Her work deals with the syntax of Mayan languages, especially ergativity and the agent focus constructions. She has done extensive fieldwork on Chol.**