

Topic in a head-marking language: the case of Yucatec Maya

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In this talk, I am going to discuss the impact of the morphological property of head marking and the absence of dependent marking on the expression of information structurally driven linearization in Yucatec Maya. Yucatec Maya is a purely head-marking language, which does not encode grammatical relations by means of case but rather uses co-indexing of the arguments on their head, i.e. verbs are marked for subjects and objects, prepositions are marked for the dependent DP, and the possessum phrase is marked for its relation to the possessor. Furthermore, the language is generally analysed as having a basic verb-initial order, yet the most frequent linearization found in natural discourse is *SVO* in which the subject appears in what is often labelled ‘topic position’. Based on the investigation of natural text productions I am going to show that the syntactic position in the left periphery is underspecified with respect to information structure and can be best explained by a constraint against the ‘crowding’ of two unmarked arguments in the postverbal domain.