

Typology of Amazonian languages

Françoise ROSE

5 x 1h15

This course offers an introduction to Amazonian languages and linguistics. This area is characterized by i) a great number of languages ii) a great diversity of languages (300 to 400), with more than 20 languages families and numerous isolates iii) under-description for many of those languages. The combination of these three factors led to characterizing the Amazonian basin as a major hot spot for linguistic diversity. This also makes the Amazonian linguistics a likely source of interesting discoveries for typologists.

The first class offers an overview of the variety of languages spoken throughout the Amazon basin, with general issues on their distribution, classification, sociolinguistics, and the development of linguistic research in this area. It also discusses whether Amazonia can be considered a linguistic area and presents the major typological features of Amazonian languages, especially those that brought new insights for cross-linguistic typology. The following classes focus on topics selected because there are pervasive in the area and particularly interesting for the linguistic typology.

The second class will introduce the phonological typology of Amazonian languages and focus on nasal harmony. Nasal harmony is remarkable in many Amazonian languages, nasality being a prosodic feature spreading to whole morphemes or words.

The third class is dedicated to the expression of adnominal possession. Possessive constructions are particularly interesting, with many nouns being obligatorily possessed and diverse possessive constructions reflecting iconically diverse conceptual types of possession.

The fourth class will present the systems of argument encoding found in Amazonian languages, especially the complex systems of person indexing on the predicates, with a special focus on the typologically rare hierarchical indexing systems.

The last class will be dedicated to the genderlects, i.e. speech varieties that depend on the gender of the speaker and/or the addressee. Categorical genderlects are rare throughout the world, but a great number of these are found in Amazonia.