Future time reference in South American indigenous languages

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The aim of this typological study is to infer interrelationships of certain TAME categories in a broad sample of South American indigenous languages (SAILS). The difficulty of teasing TAME categories apart has often resulted in studies that do not attempt to separate the categories but treat them as subsystems operating on several levels of meaning and grammar (e.g. Dahl 1985 for tense and aspect, Bybee & Fleischman 1995 for modality). This study approaches the topic of the workshop under the same assumption and specifically addresses the question of interaction patterns attested in natural languages from a bottom-up approach.

The sample presents a broad geographical and genealogical diversity of South American indigenous languages. It includes 80+ languages from 27 families and 13 unclassified ones/isolates on the South American continent (see map), including the SAILS TAME sample (Müller 2016). These languages are analyzed according to 35 overtly coded morpho-syntactic TAME features (for details see Mueller 2013) in the verbal domain, allowing for cross comparison non-related languages. The sample includes references to homonyms, e.g. features that are expressed by one form that probably developed additional meanings according to, possibly universal, grammaticalization paths (cf. Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994).

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The sample has already pointed to the development of DESIDERATIVE in certain SAILS (Mueller 2014). The SAILS in the sample show a wide variety of futures with aspectual, modal and evidential readings, e.g. Embera has different suffixes for FUTURE POSSIBILITY and FUTURE CERTAINTY, the Cubeo REMOTE FUTURE marker also encodes DUBITATIVE, and Tiriyo distinguishes between FUTURE IMPERFECTIVE and FUTURE PERFECTIVE. Based on the markendness/non-markedness of TAME in this sample, qualitative (with regard to interrelationship of TAME within one language) as well as quantitative (with regard to distribution patterns of TAME marking in all languages) research questions are addressed in this talk.

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