An Overview of Mayan Languages with Special Focus on their Morphosyntax

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In this presentation, I provide an overview of some features of the Mayan language family with special focus on morphosyntactic features such as the ergative-absolutive system, voice alternations, word order, word classes and the predicate nucleus. I first describe how the features are common to Mayan languages and then show that some languages have diverged or developed additional features. For example, Mayan languages show a classic ergative-absolutive alignment; however, ergativity is not enough to describe the family as some of the languages have developed additional systems like agentive alignment (Chol, Chontal, Mopan, Lacandon, etc.), inverse alignment (Huastec and Mam), obviative alignment (Tsotsil, Mam), split ergativity (chol-chontal, Q'anjob'alan languages, Mamean languages). Mayan languages are also known to have a classic antipassive-passive voice opposition, but some languages also have an agent focus construction that is either a retention or a new development out of the antipassive. Furthermore, some languages have developed other passives like the K'iche'an and Q'anjob'al languages with two passives or a more complex passive system like Mam with up to seven passive forms. Finally, for the grammaticalization of motion verbs into directionals, Mayan languages are known to have simplex predicates, but recent research shows that Q'anjob'al languages, Tseltal, Tojolab'al are developing a series of complex predicate constructions like resultatives, end-states, causatives, etc.