

In search of areal effects in semantic typology:
Reference frames in Mesoamerica

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Synopsis

- spatial reference frames in language contact
- MesoSpace: team, goals, tools
- the Ball & Chair study
- the distribution of the response variables
- the impact of the predictor variables
- discussion and future prospects

Spatial reference frames in language contact

- two central questions
 - are practices of language use contact-diffused?
 - can such practices constitute areal features ?
- a domain in which to look for answers: **spatial frames of reference**

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- background on reference frames
 - two kinds of *place functions* (Jackendoff 1983)
 - i.e., functions from reference entities into regions
 - *topological* (Piaget & Inhelder 1956) – perspective=frame-free
 - » means in practice independent of the orientation of the ground, the observer, and the figure-ground array (the configuration)

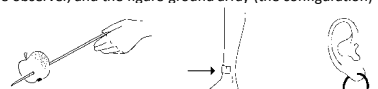


Figure 1. Some configurations that might be described in terms of topological place functions

- (1.1) *The apple is on the skewer*
- (1.2) *The band aid is on the shin*
- (1.3) *The earring is in the ear (lobe)*

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- *projective* –framework-dependent
 - the place function returns a region defined in a coordinate system centered on the reference entity
 - the axes of the coordinate system are derived from an **anchor**
 - » in **intrinsic** frames, the anchor is the reference entity
 - » in **relative** frames, it is the body of an observer
 - » in **absolute** frames, it is some environmental entity/feature

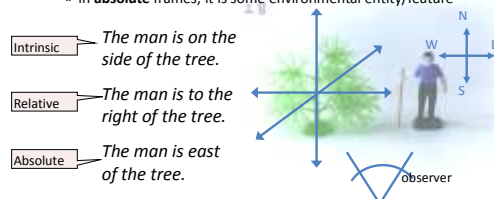


Figure 2. The three types of spatial FoRs distinguished in Levinson 1996, 2003

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- alternative classifications and subtypes

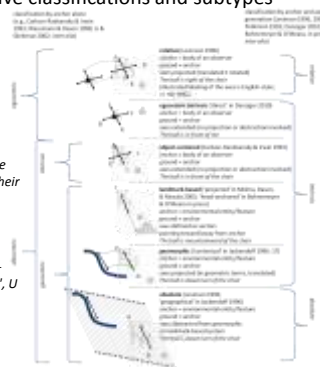


Figure 3. Reference frame types and their classification (A - 'away from', B - 'back', D - 'downriver', F - 'front', L - 'left', R - 'right', T - 'toward', U - 'upriver'; Bohnemeyer & Levinson ms.)

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- finding: a great deal of crosslinguistic variation
 - in terms of both availability and preferences

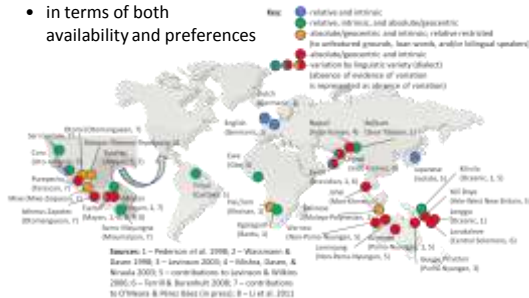


Figure 4. Reference frame use in small-scale horizontal space across languages (Bohnenmeyer & Levinson ms.)

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- two competing interpretations

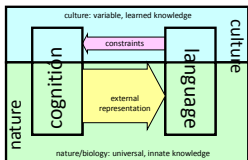


Figure 7. The Innatist vision

Innatist interpretation (Li & Gleitman 2002; Li et al 2011; *inter alia*)

- innate knowledge of all FoR types
- variation only in usage preferences
- variation caused by adaptation to the environment - topography, population geography, education, literacy
- language plays no role in the cultural transmission of practices of spatial reference

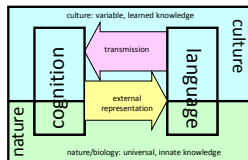


Figure 8. The Neo-Whorfean vision

Neo-Whorfean interpretation (Levinson 1996, 2003; Pederson et al 1998; *inter alia*)

- knowledge of some FoR types is culturally transmitted
- language plays a key role in the cultural transmission of practices of spatial reference
- the adaptation to the environment happens at the phylogenetic level, not at the ontogenetic level

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- but do reference frames diffuse through contact?
 - languages borrow from one another
 - phonetic, prosodic, phonotactic patterns; phonemes; morphemes; lexemes; lexical patterns; constructions
 - but reference frames are semantic patterns
 - which are only indirectly related to particular lexical items



true in which type of FoR?

The ball is in front of the chair	relative	intrinsic
The ball is left of the chair	intrinsic	relative

Figure 9. Truth conditions of intrinsic and relative descriptions of Ball & Chair 3.9 (left) and 3.12

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- alignment between language and cognition
 - preferences for particular frame types in discourse and recall memory covary

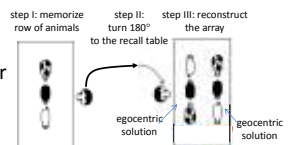
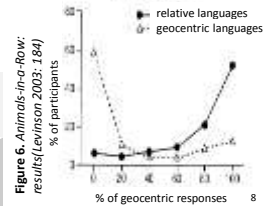


Figure 5. Animals-in-a-Row: design

Table 1. Animals-in-a-Row in Levinson 2003: the large sample

Linguistically Relative	English, Dutch, Japanese, Tamil-Urban	Prediction: Non-verbal coding will be relative	N = 85
Linguistically Absolute	Arrernte, Hai/om, Tzeltal, Longu, Belhare, Tamil-Bural	Prediction: Non-verbal coding will be absolute	N = 99



Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- the role of language contact
 - the Neo-Whorfeans view language as a transmission system for nonlinguistic cognition
 - this suggests that not only a person's L1, but also their L2/3/..., may affect their cognition
 - experimental support: Boroditsky et al 2003
 - learning the grammatical gender system of a made up language influences English speaker's category associations
 - counterevidence: Finkbeiner et al 2003
 - Japanese-English bilinguals behave exactly like monolingual Japanese speakers on a manner/path similarity judgment task
 - even though Japanese is verb-framed, whereas English is satellite-framed

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- our test case: the Mesoamerican sprachbund



Figure 10. Mesoamerican language map (contemporary distribution) source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mesoamericanlanguages.png>; lines showing approximate boundaries of Mesoamerican area added by the authors

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- possible areal features according to Campbell 1979, Campbell, Kaufman, & Smith-Stark 1986
 - lack of phonemic voicing contrasts in stops and fricatives
 - shared throughout MA, with only a few exceptions
 - including Tequistlatec, Huave, and some OM
 - neighbors to the north (e.g., O'odham; Tarahumara) and south (e.g., Sumu, Miskito; Chibchan) do have them
 - no V-final constituent orders except in Mixean
 - Yuman and most Uto-Aztecan languages to the north and Chibchan and Misumalpan to the south are V-final
 - correlated with the absence of V-final order, adnominal possessors predominantly follow the possessum
 - not so in Sumu and Miskito to the south of MA;
 - not in most UA languages to the north of MA

Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- possible areal features (cont.)
 - few or no adpositions
 - relational nouns and applicatives used instead
 - semantic calques
 - this includes the vigesimal numeral system and a rich set of meronymic metaphors

1. head: mouth of house	26. Hualteco: stone (of) white
2. head: side/neck of tree	27. cane: end of (head)
3. head: end of ring	28. canoe: middle, top, middle, bottom, mouth
4. water: side of boat	29. soldier: left/center/right
5. path: measurement/length of line	30. soldier: mouth
6. eye: front/back/side of face	31. mouth: center of hand
7. hole: center	32. mouth of person's forehead/eye of person
8. finger: side of hand	33. arrow: middle, end
9. arrow: front/back/side of arrow	34. arrow: middle, longer, entire, pointed
10. arrow: front/back/side of arrow	35. arrow: end
11. ring: end of water head	36. water: water (of) water
12. whole: side, straight	37. water: end
13. canoe: front/back/side in canoe way to side	38. water: water (of) water
14. canoe: front/back/side	39. water: water (of) water
15. canoe: side	40. water: water (of) water
16. canoe: side	41. water: water (of) water
17. canoe: side	42. water: water (of) water
18. ring: measurement of ring	43. water: water (of) water
19. whole: measurement of whole	44. water: water (of) water
20. whole: measurement of whole	45. water: water (of) water
21. whole: measurement of whole	46. water: water (of) water
22. whole: measurement of whole	47. water: water (of) water
23. whole: measurement of whole	48. water: water (of) water
24. whole: measurement of whole	49. water: water (of) water
25. whole: measurement of whole	50. water: water (of) water
26. whole: measurement of whole	51. water: water (of) water
27. whole: measurement of whole	52. water: water (of) water
28. whole: measurement of whole	53. water: water (of) water
29. whole: measurement of whole	54. water: water (of) water
30. whole: measurement of whole	55. water: water (of) water
31. whole: measurement of whole	56. water: water (of) water
32. whole: measurement of whole	57. water: water (of) water
33. whole: measurement of whole	58. water: water (of) water
34. whole: measurement of whole	59. water: water (of) water
35. whole: measurement of whole	60. water: water (of) water
36. whole: measurement of whole	61. water: water (of) water
37. whole: measurement of whole	62. water: water (of) water
38. whole: measurement of whole	63. water: water (of) water
39. whole: measurement of whole	64. water: water (of) water
40. whole: measurement of whole	65. water: water (of) water
41. whole: measurement of whole	66. water: water (of) water
42. whole: measurement of whole	67. water: water (of) water
43. whole: measurement of whole	68. water: water (of) water
44. whole: measurement of whole	69. water: water (of) water
45. whole: measurement of whole	70. water: water (of) water
46. whole: measurement of whole	71. water: water (of) water
47. whole: measurement of whole	72. water: water (of) water
48. whole: measurement of whole	73. water: water (of) water
49. whole: measurement of whole	74. water: water (of) water
50. whole: measurement of whole	75. water: water (of) water
51. whole: measurement of whole	76. water: water (of) water
52. whole: measurement of whole	77. water: water (of) water
53. whole: measurement of whole	78. water: water (of) water
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55. whole: measurement of whole	80. water: water (of) water
56. whole: measurement of whole	81. water: water (of) water
57. whole: measurement of whole	82. water: water (of) water
58. whole: measurement of whole	83. water: water (of) water
59. whole: measurement of whole	84. water: water (of) water
60. whole: measurement of whole	85. water: water (of) water
61. whole: measurement of whole	86. water: water (of) water
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63. whole: measurement of whole	88. water: water (of) water
64. whole: measurement of whole	89. water: water (of) water
65. whole: measurement of whole	90. water: water (of) water
66. whole: measurement of whole	91. water: water (of) water
67. whole: measurement of whole	92. water: water (of) water
68. whole: measurement of whole	93. water: water (of) water
69. whole: measurement of whole	94. water: water (of) water
70. whole: measurement of whole	95. water: water (of) water
71. whole: measurement of whole	96. water: water (of) water
72. whole: measurement of whole	97. water: water (of) water
73. whole: measurement of whole	98. water: water (of) water
74. whole: measurement of whole	99. water: water (of) water
75. whole: measurement of whole	100. water: water (of) water

Table 1. Some pan-MA calques (CK&S p. 553)


Spatial reference frames in language contact (cont.)

- particularly interesting for our purposes
 - the vigesimal system and the meronym calques at least suggest contact-diffused usage practices
 - although the effect is in this case "set" in the meanings of lexical items
 - the role of Spanish as the dominant contact language of the area
 - relative frames of reference play only a minor role in many Mesoamerican languages
 - cf. the contributions to O'Meara & Pérez Báez (eds.) 2011 and references therein
 - in contrast, Spanish as a European language favors relative frames in small-scale space
 - cf. Eggleston 2012 on Peninsular (Barcelonan) and Nicaraguan Spanish in comparison to Sumu-Mayangna

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- spatial reference frames in language contact
- MesoSpace: team, goals, tools
- the Ball & Chair study
- the distribution of the response variables
- the impact of the predictor variables
- discussion and future prospects

MesoSpace: team, goals, tools

- NSF award #BCS-0723694 

Spatial language and cognition in Mesoamerica
- MesoSpace aims to contribute to the debate from two angles
 - we are working on a series of studies that pit linguistic against non-linguistic predictors
 - in reference frame use across languages
 - we are also investigating a possible lexico-syntactic factor that may bias speakers against relative FoRs
 - namely the productive use of shape-based meronyms in the representation of space

MesoSpace: team, goals, tools (cont.)



• 14 Mesoamerican (MA) languages

- Mayan
 - Chol (J.-J. Vázquez)
 - K'anjob'al (E. Mateo)
 - Tzeltal (several variants; G. Polian)
 - Yucatec (J. Bohnermeyer)
- Mixe-Zoquean
 - Ayutla Mixe (R. Romero)
 - Sotapanec (S. Gutierrez)
 - Tecpatán Zoque (R. Zavala)
- Oto-Manguean
 - Isthmus (Juchitán) Zapotec (G. Pérez)
 - Otomí (N. Hernández, S. Hernández, E. Palancar)
- Huave (S. Herrera)
- Purépecha (A. Capistrán)
- Totonac-Tepahuan
 - Huehuetla Tepehua (S. Smythe)
- Uto-Aztecan
 - Pajapan Nawat (V. Peralta)

Figure 11. MesoSpace: field sites

MesoSpace: team, goals, tools (cont.)

- non-MA “controls”
 - Seri (C. O’Meara)
 - Cora (Uto-Aztecan; V. Vázquez)
 - Mayangna (E. Benedicto, A. Eggleston in collaboration with the Mayangna Yulbarangyang Balna)
 - Mexican, Nicaraguan, and Barcelonan Spanish (R. Romero; E. Benedicto, A. Eggleston)
- 2 (interrelated) domains
 - frames of reference and meronyms (labels for entity parts)



Figure 12. The MesoSpace team (minus V. Peraita and R. Tucker)

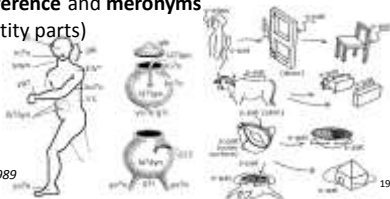


Figure 13. Meronyms in Ayoquesco Zapotec (left) and Tenejapa Tzeltal (adapted from MacLaury 1989 and Levinson 1994)

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The Ball & Chair study

- our tool for studying the use of FoRs in discourse
 - a referential communication task: Ball & Chair (B&C)
 - replacing Men & Tree (M&T) in Pederson et al (1998) etc.
 - B&C allows us to discover selection preferences for any of the FoR types
 - › at the in-door scale
 - › M&T may for various reasons depress the use of intrinsic FoRs

Figure 14. Design of the Men and Tree task (Pederson et al. 1998: 362)

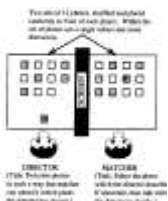


Figure 15. Two of the Ball & Chair fotos, featuring an intrinsic contrast

The Ball & Chair study (cont.)

- the data set of the present study
 - B&C data from 11 varieties
 - 6 Mesoamerican languages
 - Yucatec Maya (J. Bohnemeyer)
 - Ayutla Mixe (R. Romero)
 - San Ildefonso Tultepec Otomí (N. Hernández, S. Hernández, E. Palancar)
 - Purépecha (or Tarascan; A. Capistrán)
 - Chacoma Tzeltal (G. Polian)
 - Juchitán (Isthmus) Zapotec (G. Pérez)
 - 2 non-Mesoamerican indigenous languages
 - Seri (C. O’Meara)
 - Sumu-Mayangna (E. Benedicto, A. Eggleston, Mayangna Yulbarangyang Balna)
 - 3 varieties of Spanish
 - from Barcelona (A. Eggleston), Mexico (R. Romero), and Nicaragua (A. Eggleston)

The Ball & Chair study (cont.)

- these are all the languages of the MesoSpace sample the data from which have been coded so far
- data from five dyads of participants per variety are included in the analysis
 - except for the case of
 - Mexican Spanish, where up to now only the data from three of the five dyads have been coded
 - Istmus Zapotec, where we have data from six dyads
- responses are accompanied by the researchers’ estimates of the participants’
 - level of education
 - frequency of use of Spanish (as first or second language)
 - frequency of reading and writing

The Ball & Chair study (cont.)

- coding
 - we coded descriptions of the location of the ball
 - distinguishing among eight categories (see Figure 3 above)
 - allocentric intrinsic
 - egocentric intrinsic (‘direct’; Danziger 2010)
 - egocentric extrinsic = relative
 - intrinsic and relative aligned (Carlson-Radvansky & Irvin 1993)
 - geocentric (= geomorphic, landmark-based, or absolute)
 - vertical absolute
 - vertical absolute and intrinsic aligned (Carlson-Radvansky & Irvin 1993)
 - topological (no reference frame involved; Piaget & Inhelder 1956)

The Ball & Chair study (cont.)

- all of the languages in the sample have the lexical and grammatical resources for using all FoR types
 - in no case does the grammar or lexicon of the language constrain the use of particular frame types
 - a given speech community’s preferences for using particular frame types are strictly a matter of usage
 - they are a part of the community’s practices of language use
 - the question the studies reported here address is this:
 - does the frame use of individual speakers reflect not only the practices of their L1 speech community
 - but also those of communities whose languages they use as L2 speakers?

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The Ball & Chair study (cont.)

- the similarity matrix
 - for each participant, we calculated a set of eight frequencies
 - these sets can be interpreted as points in an octodimensional space
 - the distances between the points represent the similarity across the participants’ responses
 - we calculated the distances in the “Manhattan” metric
 - where the distance between two points is the sum of the differences of the coordinates
 - we can use this similarity measure to analyze
 - how the responses cluster
 - which factors predict the similarity between participants

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The Ball & Chair study (cont.)

- the similarity matrix (cont.)
 - innovation
 - previous multivariate analyses in semantic typology construct similarity matrices over the stimulus items
 - cf. Levinson & Meira 2003; Majid et al 2008
 - in contrast, our approach treats the (dyads of) participants as statistical units
 - this allows us to treat language as a direct predictor variable

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The distribution of the response variables

- how do the participants’ responses cluster?
 - MDS analysis shows two broad groups
 - cf. Schiffman et al 1981



Figure 16. MDS plot

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MDS analysis (cont.)

- a strong correlation emerges b/w the dimension of the MDS plot and the use of geocentric frames
 - » Spearman’s Rho 0.95
 - and weaker negative correlation between the first dimension and the use of relative frames
 - » Spearman’s Rho -0.8
- the second dimension shows a weak correlation with the frequency of topological descriptions
 - » Spearman’s Rho 0.79

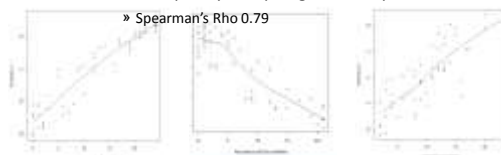
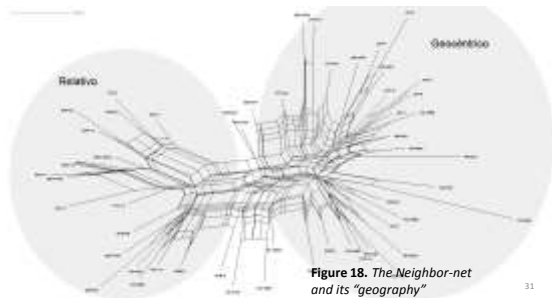


Figure 17. Correlations between the dimensions of the MDS plot and the frequency of geocentric (left), relative (center), and topological (right) descriptions.

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Enter MesoSpace (cont.)

- the effect of relative and geocentric usage can also be visualized in a Neighbor-net of the similarity matrix
 - using Spltstree4 (cf. Hudson & Bryant 2006)



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Linear regression analysis (cont.)

- implementation
 - we used a generalized linear **mixed-effects** model (GLMM; cf. Gelman & Hill 2007, Jaeger 2008)
 - implemented using the ARM package in R (Gelman et al 2012)
 - it is a ‘mixed-effects’ model in that it includes random nested intercepts for individual languages and dyads
 - in addition to the ‘fixed’ effects of the predictor variables and an invariable intercept
 - to avoid over-fitting or lack of independence
 - the probability of a given dyad using any of the eight response categories to describe a particular picture
 - is independent of the probability of them using any other type of frame to describe the same picture

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MDS analysis (cont.)

- discussion
 - the MDS and Neighbor-net analyses show
 - that the participants differentiated themselves most strongly in their use of relative, geocentric, and topological descriptions
 - the question now: which factors predict which of these strategies a speaker/dyad selects?
 - candidate predictor variables:
 - ① L1
 - ② L2 (... Ln)
 - ③ literacy
 - ④ education
 - ⑤ topography
 - ⑥ population geography
 - the linear regression we present in the following tests (1) – (4)

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The impact of the predictor variables

- to analyze the role of the predictor variables we conducted a linear regression analysis
- we tested separate models for the strongest differentiating response variables
 - the use of relative and geocentric frames
- we modeled the geocentric and relative FoR scores
 - of just the speakers of the indigenous languages
 - as a function of education level, literacy level, L2-Spanish usage level
 - and areal-linguistic affiliation: Mesoamerican vs. non-Mesoamerican

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Linear regression analysis (cont.)

- findings
 - the fitted geocentric model revealed L2-Spanish use and literacy as significant factors
- ```

Generalized linear mixed model fit by the Laplace approximation
Formula: lgeoc ~ edu + esp + lit + Ltyp + (1 | ID) + (1 | LANG)
Data: .l1
 AIC BIC logLik deviance
1559 1598 -772.7 1545
Correlation of Fixed Effects:
 (Intr) edu esp lit
Random effects:
 esp -0.477 -0.174
 lit -0.165 -0.739 -0.034
 LtypMES -0.735 -0.050 0.010 0.152
Number of obs: 1787, groups: ID, 82; LANG, 8
Fixed effects:
 Estimate Std. Error z value Pr(>|z|)
(Intercept) -1.0799 1.3550 -0.797 0.4255
edu -0.4788 0.4951 -0.967 0.3335
esp -0.8469 0.3353 -2.526 0.0115 *
lit 1.1892 0.4836 2.459 0.0139 *
LtypMES 0.3375 1.2535 0.269 0.7878

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

```

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Linear regression analysis (cont.)

- findings (cont.)
  - the fitted relative model revealed only L2-Spanish use as significant

```

Generalized linear mixed model fit by the Laplace approximation
Formula: Lrel ~ edu + esp + lit + Ltyp + (1 | ID) + (1 | LANG)
Data: ..1
AIC BIC logLik deviance Correlation of Fixed Effects:
1422 1461 -704.1 1408 (Intr) edu esp lit
Random effects:
Groups Name Variance Std.Dev. lit
ID (Intercept) 0.44961 0.67053 LtypMES -0.588 -0.074 -0.040 0.250
LANG (Intercept) 0.14426 0.37981
Number of obs: 1787, groups: ID, 82; LANG, 8

Fixed effects:
Estimate Std. Error z value Pr(>|z|)
(Intercept) -2.43468 0.57355 -4.245 2.19e-05 ***
edu -0.20378 0.28745 -0.709 0.4784
esp 0.45204 0.19250 2.348 0.0189 *
lit 0.05716 0.28627 0.200 0.8417
LtypMES -0.58065 0.40908 -1.419 0.1558

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

```

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Linear regression analysis (cont.)

- findings
  - our GLMMs did not find a significant effect of the areal-linguistic affiliation variable
    - Wald-p = .79 for the geocentric and .16 for the relative model
- discussion
  - the speakers of the indigenous languages use relative frames in their native languages more frequently
    - the more frequently they use Spanish as an L2
  - this suggests that habituation to the use of relative frames diffuses through contact with Spanish
  - our failure to find evidence of an areal effect caused us to conduct further analyses

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Linear regression analysis (cont.)

- probing the lack of evidence for an areal effect
  - we ran a cluster analysis of the original similarity matrix
    - including the data from the L1-Spanish speakers
  - we applied an agglomerative algorithm using the 'cluster' and 'MASS' packages in R

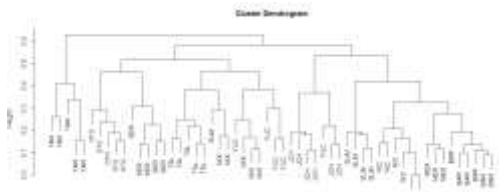


Figure 19. Cluster analysis dendrogram of the similarity matrix of the Ball & Chair data. 39

Linear regression analysis (cont.)

- findings
  - the individual languages tend to form cohesive clusters
  - the speakers of the three Spanish dialects form a single cluster
  - however, the speakers of the Mesoamerican languages do not form a single cluster
    - to the exclusions of the speakers of the non-MA indigenous languages

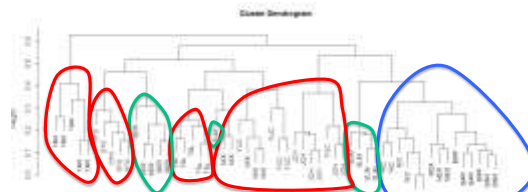


Figure 20. Color-coding the clusters: red – Mesoamerican; green – non-Mesoamerican indigenous languages; blue – varieties of Spanish. 40

## Synopsis

- spatial reference frames in language contact
- MesoSpace: team, goals, tools
- the Ball & Chair study
- the distribution of the response variables
- the impact of the predictor variables
- discussion and future prospects

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## Discussion and future prospects

- estimated frequency of L2 Spanish use is a significant predictor of the use of relative frames
  - by speakers of the indigenous languages in the sample
    - so is literacy, but not education
- this finding supports the hypothesis that reference frame types diffuse through language contact
- in contrast, we did not find evidence for an areal effect
  - the speakers of the Mesoamerican languages distinguish themselves from the speakers of the Spanish varieties
    - but not clearly from the speakers of the two non-Mesoamerican indigenous languages Seri and Sumu

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Discussion and future prospects (cont.)

- by hypothesis, any feature that can be contact-diffused should also be able to be areally shared
  - so our failure to find an areal effect seems to call for an explanation
- possible factors
  - sampling artifact
    - the use of reference frames in Seri and/or Sumu could be accidentally so similar to that in some MA languages
      - as to mask a possible areal effect
  - effects of current vs. historic contact
    - whereas the effect of Spanish on the use of reference frames may be ongoing, a *sprachbund* effect likely not
      - since the MA *sprachbund* is no longer “active” in many regions <sup>43</sup>

Discussion and future prospects (cont.)

- the Mesoamerican linguistic area as a *fossilized sprachbund*
  - the contact that caused the convergence of linguistic features in MA unfolded mostly in pre-Columbian times
  - at present, contact among indigenous languages is mostly restricted to certain hotspots
    - chiefly, to parts of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guatemala
  - none of the indigenous languages of the MesoSpace subsample are currently in contact with one another
  - given the evidence for intra-variety mutability of reference frame use...
    - cf. Pederson et al 1998; Mishra et al 2003
    - ... it stands to reason that areal effects in frame use that may have existed prior to the Conquest are no longer visible <sup>44</sup>

Discussion and future prospects (cont.)

- what’s next?
  - include data from additional Mesoamerican languages in the analysis
  - run a second analysis based on speakers’ self-estimations of Spanish use, literacy, and education
  - run similar analyses on the recall memory data
  - extend all of the above to languages from other parts of the world
    - as part of the new project *Spatial Language and Cognition Beyond Mesoamerica* ☺
      - NSF Award No. BCS-1053123
      - <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~jb77/Mesospace1b.html>

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