

## **The role of historical corpora in the reconstruction of proto-syntax**

Katalin É. Kiss

Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy, and Pázmány Péter Catholic University

It is a much debated issue whether there are any reliable means of reconstructing proto-syntax (cf., e.g., Lightfoot 2002, Ferraresi & Goldbach 2008). This talk will argue that the reconstruction of syntactic phenomena of a proto-language can be based on the generalization that the progress of a linguistic innovation over time forms an S-curve. If the linguistic corpus of the documented history of a language allow us to draw up S-curves, they can be extended backwards, thereby providing information on the previous, undocumented phase of the language, as well.

This method of reconstruction will be illustrated by case studies concerning the syntax of Proto-Hungarian. It will be argued that Proto-Hungarian – as opposed to the SVO Modern Hungarian – was a strictly SOV language favoring non-finite complementation. Various syntactic phenomena typical of SOV languages will be shown to be present in gradually decreasing proportions in Old Hungarian documents, either completely disappearing by the Middle Hungarian period, or surviving only in linguistic fossils. The phenomena discussed include OV order giving way to VO; prenominal non-finite relatives derived by the gap relativization strategy giving way to relative clauses derived by wh-movement; and agreeing infinitival and participial clauses giving way to finite clauses introduced by a subordinating complementizer.

The constructions hypothesized for Proto-Hungarian will also be supported by parallel phenomena of Khanty and Mansi, the sister languages of Hungarian.