**Martina Wiltschko (University of British Columbia) –** *On the (in)significance of morphological type*

In this talk I explore the traditional morphological typology which divides languages based on morphological type (e.g., isolating, agglutinative, fusional, intro-flecting, and polysynthetic). Problems with this typology have long been identified to the effect that it is deemed "incoherent and useless" (Spencer 1991). For example, the traditional morphological types are not mutually exclusive, and thus any given language may simultaneously instantiate several types (Sapir 1921: 99). In addition, I show that there are meaningful units of language that resist classification along the traditional criteria. For example, Fujimori 2011 shows that vowel quality in Yamato Japanese is a perfect predictor for the telicity of verbs: while monosyllabic verbs containing /e/ or /u/ are always telic, those with /i/ or /o/ are always atelic (verbs with /a/ can be either telic or atelic). Moreover, Jacobs 2011 shows that Squamish (Salish) associates meaning with a particular syntactic configuration rather than an identifiable "morpheme". It is in this respect that classical morphological type is insignificant in that it does not allow us to understand all patterns of form-meaning correspondences attested in natural language.

At the same time, I argue, that there is a real need for a formal typology that is not based on meaning or substance. That is, to compare categorial inventories of languages to each other (with the ultimate goal of finding universal categories) we cannot proceed by comparison based on meaning (contra Haspelmath 2007 who argues that comparison must be based on substance). It is in this way that the traditional morphological typology is significant in that it is a typology that is purely based on formal properties rather than meaning. The goal of this talk is to develop a formal typology that allows for the classification and thus comparison of all patterns of form-meaning correspondences.

**References**
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