

## Morphosyntactic coding of proper names and its implications for the Empathy Hierarchy

Oral presentation/ perhaps theme session 2 "Typological hierarchies in synchrony and diachrony..."

The Empathy Hierarchy (EH) is one of the most important generalizations in linguistic typology employed for the description and explanation of the typological distribution of different morphosyntactic phenomena in the domain of case marking and agreement in the languages of the world. The different names assigned to the EH in the literature reflects different functional interpretation: 'lexical hierarchy' (Silverstein 1976), 'Nominal Hierarchy' (Dixon 1994) 'animacy hierarchy' (Comrie 1981) 'empathy hierarchy' (Kuno & Kaburaki 1977; DeLancey 1981), 'hierarchy of reference' (Zwicky 1977), and 'prominence hierarchy' (Aissen 1999). The EH is a scale of different classes of referential expressions (1/2 > 3 > **proper names/ kin terms** > human > non-human > inanimate common nouns; cf. Dixon 1979) stating that the speaker is more likely to take over the perspective of a referent that is higher on the EH. Proper names are claimed to occupy an intermediate place between personal pronouns and common nouns. Despite the large body of research on the EH since its first extensive formulation in Silverstein (1976), it is astonishing to discover that there is almost no empirical evidence for this claim. Silverstein (1976), for instance, discusses a couple of Australian languages with split ergativity marking, but does not give a single example to demonstrate the position of proper names on the EH. The same lack of evidence can be found in Blake (1994) and almost all publication that deal with the EH in one way or other; even the articles in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Case* (Malchukov & Spencer (eds.) 2009) ignore case marking of proper names entirely. Some of the examples given in Dixon (1994) could be considered as evidence, but are often inconclusive or even contradictory to this hypothesis.

The goal of our proposed talk is to give an answer to the question whether the morphosyntactic coding of proper names in the languages of the world confirms or falsifies their hypothesized position within the EH.

In the first part of our talk we will give a very brief evaluation on the state of the art of research on the EH and the kind of data that were presented in the literature in favor of the EH in general and with regard to proper names in particular. We will further discuss the question what kind of data are in principle required in order to prove (or disprove) that proper names are correctly positioned between pronouns and nouns in the EH. Some remarks on language sampling and methods of analysis will follow: in order to find the data that we need to answer the research question, we compiled a probability sample selecting languages that have an ergative split marking system and languages that have a hierarchical marking system. For each language of the sample we looked whether proper names pattern with personal pronouns, or with common nouns (or sub-categories of them), or with neither in coding the core grammatical relations.

In the second part we will present the results together with consequences that have to be drawn for the form of the EH. Up to now, our findings do not allow drawing firm conclusions. There are very few clear data in favor of the hypothesis, and there are also some data that thoroughly contradict the hypothesis. Most data are simply inconclusive. A clearer picture will be given in our talk which will be based then on a much broader empirical basis.

### References:

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