A language change approach to probabilistic universals: case and order
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In this talk I will discuss theoretical implications of robust typological correlations between case and order: a positive correlation between SOV and the presence of a nominal case paradigm and a negative correlation between SVO and the absence thereof (Greenberg 1966, Dryer 2002, Comrie 2013, Kiparsky 1997 a.o.). It has further been observed that also *the extent to which* a language engages an argument distinguishing word order (i.e. SVO) negatively correlates with the extent to which a language engages morphological case marking (Sinnemäki 2008). With the aim of understanding what these correlations tell us about the architecture of the grammar of a given language (rather than typological trends), I will examine them in the diachronic perspective, reformulating as expected correlations between (morphological) case and (SVO) order frequencies for diachronic stages of a single language using English and French corpora. Having shown the expectations to be borne out, as a final step, I will sketch a game-theoretic model which captures a case-order relation at the level of the grammar of an individual speaker while avoiding making wrong predictions concerning case-order patterns in individual utterances (warned against in Pintzuk 2002). In addition to addressing the relationship between typological probabilistic universals and language grammar, this projects provides quantitative support for the age-long hypothesis about a causal relation between the historical disappearance of nominal case and the passage to SVO (e.g. Roberts 1997, pace McFadden 2004).