

# ISW Colloquium – Fall Semester 2024

28.10.2024 | 16:00-17:00 | UniTobler F 003

## **Julie Marsault (*Université Sorbonne Nouvelle & LACITO*): Diminutive consonantal shifts in Native North American languages with a focus on Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup>**

Many Native languages of North America, especially in the western part of the continent, possess a specific type of sound symbolism, where consonant shifts express augmentation/diminution or various degrees of intensity (Nichols 1971). For example, in Hualapai (Yuman, California/Arizona), we observe the pair *lebk* ‘for a large object to be flapping’ and *rebk* ‘for a small object to be flapping’ (Watahomigie et al. 1982, cited in Hantgan & Sipes 2022). This type of consonant symbolism has been described in Nichols (1971), the most detailed, continent-wide survey on this topic heretofore. Nichols identifies several categories of phonetic shifts. While some of them seem scarce outside of the American continent (for instance, having /r/ as a diminutive for //, as illustrated above, or having the diminutive expressed by articulatory fronting), another type of alternation seems to correspond to a universal tendency: palatalization (cf. Alderete & Kochetov 2017).

First, I will introduce the literature on diminutive consonant shifts in Native North America. Second, I will show that Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup> (also Omaha; Siouan family) displays two types of diminutive shifts: on the one hand, a shift involving the point of articulation of fricatives, with two or three possible positions. This shift is a well-known feature of Siouan languages as a whole, and it is taken into account in Nichols’ survey as a diminutive shift using fronting. On the other hand, Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup> shows a palatalization of dental plosives, which become affricates. This palatalization phenomenon affects a totally different set of words and morphemes, and apparently is an innovation resulting from baby-talk (Larson 2016), not found in other languages of the family. This second type of shift is not reported in any typological or areal study on diminutive symbolism or on consonant shifts heretofore.

### **References**

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- Hantgan, Abbie & Sipes, Corbyn. 2022. The archiphonaestheme in Pai languages; a lexicographic challenge. Paris. (Presented at the Workshop Consonant and vowel symbolism in Native North American languages, Paris, December 9 2022, Paris.)
- Larson, Rory. 2016. Regular sound shifts in the history of Siouan. In Rudin, Catherine & Gordon, Binah (eds.), *Advances in the study of Siouan languages and linguistics*, 63–83. Language Science Press.
- Nichols, Johanna. 1971. Diminutive consonant symbolism in western North America. *Language* 47(4). 826–48.
- Watahomigie, Lucille J., Yamamoto, Akira Y., and Bender, Jorigine. 1982. Hualapai reference grammar. Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, UCLA.