Nonrecursive, nonendocentric, and nonbinary structures in Amazonian languages:
Counterexamples vs. exceptions

In this talk I will look at the absence of recursive structures in Pírahã (Futrell, Stearns, Everett, Gibson, and Piantadosi (in prep)) as well as nonbinary, exocentric intentional state constructions in Wari’. I will make the case that in terms of Greenbergian-like "surface true" predictions these data are anomalous. Are they exceptions or counterexamples? Then I look at the data from the perspective of “formal universals” (Chomsky 1965: 27ff). I argue that the data violate the formal universals or the universals must be augmented by ancillary hypotheses such that they lose any force. The conclusion is that field research is best carried out informed by multiple theories, yet with a focus on languages rather than language.