

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

MICHELLE YUAN

University of Chicago
speaking on

**Ergativity as object shift in Inuit:
New insights from microvariation**

Thursday, February 7, 2019
2:30 PM

Location: HUM 2 - Room 259

Abstract:

A key working hypothesis in generative linguistic research is that the syntax of natural language is organized by a finite set of abstract principles with a constrained space for potential variation. A natural consequence of this view is that linguistic phenomena that may appear unrelated on the surface may in fact be underlyingly linked—and, as such, are expected to interact in systematic ways.

In this talk, I present a demonstration of this idea from the Inuit dialect continuum, in which the ergative patterning has been reported to be weaker in certain dialects than others (Johns 2001, Carrier 2017). The core proposal is that variation in ergativity across Inuit is tightly linked to variation in syntactic movement of the transitive (ABS) object—a pattern reminiscent of object shift in better-studied languages (cf. Woolford 2017). Taking this correlation seriously, I present a new model of ergativity in which ERG case morphology on the subject is a *byproduct* of object movement (Marantz 1991, Baker 2015), but is otherwise unrelated to ergative case alignment more broadly. Beyond the central analysis, these findings also offer a case study of microvariation as a methodological tool for investigating syntactic structure.