Abstract: In global perspective, Amazonia stands out as region of extraordinarily high linguistic diversity, which is particularly striking both in terms of the number of distinct genetic units represented, and the tendency for these to have very few members (as seen e.g. in the disproportionately high number of isolates). These facts imply two parallel processes over time: 1) the maintenance of linguistic distinctions, and 2) restrained cladogenesis (splitting). These processes must have applied in Amazonia to a degree that can be detected hardly anywhere else in the world, with the possible exception of New Guinea. While efforts to understand global patterns of linguistic diversity have explored a wide range of nonlinguistic correlates, associations with sociocultural patterns have generally tended to assume a correspondence between the maintenance and/or genesis of distinct languages and a lack of contact among groups. In this talk, I argue that the maintenance of the extensive diversity of languages and families in the Amazon basin has in fact been widely grounded in the dynamics of interaction among groups, as opposed to being simply a factor of isolation. I focus on linguistic evidence for contact, drawing on an extensive survey of lexical and grammatical features across dozens of Amazonian languages. An evaluation of patterns of lexical borrowing, Wanderwörter, and grammatical diffusion suggests that multilingual interaction has been widespread in native Amazonia, facilitated by particular activities such as trade, intermarriage, and participation in networks of ritual practice. Interaction has been particularly heavy in particular zones, such as the Upper Rio Negro and the Guianas, but evidence of language contact indicates that these zones were themselves linked within much larger networks of interaction. Even while contact has led to a convergence of linguistic features on some levels, the particular dynamics of interaction across Amazonian regions – themselves arguably a product of diffusion in culture and discourse – have encouraged the maintenance of linguistic distinctions, most notably in the lexicon, thereby fostering the region’s impressive levels of linguistic diversity.