Konrad Rybka is an anthropological linguist with an areal commitment to
the Guianas and adjacent regions and a penchant for the linguistic
encoding of space, particularly large-scale space. Since 2009 he has been
working with the speakers of Lokono, a critically endangered Arawakan
language spoken in Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. For his doctoral
project, he analyzed the grammatical and lexical structures that the
speakers have at their disposal when talking about landscape and the
knowledge system that these structures reveal. He has particularly been
interested in the difference between how the Lokono describe spatial relations between tabletop
entities (e.g., apple, bowl) and those between large-scale entities (e.g., forest, hill). Rybka
collaborated with Niclas Burenhult’s Language, Cognition and Landscape project—an
interdisciplinary team of researchers investigating the domain of landscape in a number of
languages. This opportunity has added a comparative element to the study of Lokono landscape and
the tabletop-landscape dichotomy in particular. In addition to conducting fieldwork on Lokono, he
has visited the Wayuu people in Colombia to collect data for an interdisciplinary publication on
cross-cultural landscape preferences. Together with Burenhult and his mentor, Prof. Kees
Hengeveld, he organized an international symposium Interdisciplinary approaches to landscape
representation. The symposium offered another opportunity for cross-linguistic and interdisciplinary
debates on the expression of space and landscape across languages.