Language Typology and Universals (CL1.204)

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Introduction

Where we say *Ram killed Ravan* in English, in French the equivalent is *Ram a tué Ravan*, and in Hindi it is *Ram ne Ravan ko mārā*.
Thus English and French follow a SVO (subject-verb-object) order, while Hindi (like most Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages) follow SOV. Such similarities and differences among languages allows us to extend technologies developed for one language to a number of others.

Words in languages carry information in their morphemes. Typically, verbs include TAM (tense-aspect-modality) information, while nouns include GNP (gender-number-person) and case information.
Different languages have different categories for each of these fields. For example, Hindi distinguishes only two grammatical genders (masculine-feminine); Telugu also distinguishes between two (masculine human vs. everything else in the singular, and human-nonhuman in the plural); Bengali and Malayalam nouns have no gender.

Dakkhini is a variety spoken in Hyderabad, very similar to Hindi but with significant differences. For example, *honā* is equivalent to Hindi *cāhie*; and in quoted speech, the quoted clause comes before the main clause (as in Dravidian languages, but distinct from Indo-Aryan languages), with the conjunction *bolke*.

Even within a language, however, there are significant differences in usage. We can distinguish idiolects, gender-, age- and region-based registers (sociolects), and so on.

There are two approaches to studying a language – the *synchronic* and the *diachronic* studies. Synchronic studies consider the state of a language at some fixed point, while diachronic studies involve the change in a language over a longer period. Typically, sound changes occur relatively quickly, while morphology is slower and syntax is more static.