

# Language Typology: an introduction

- A working definition of ‘Typology’ outside linguistics is roughly synonymous with ‘TAXONOMY’ which means ‘classification of ‘x’, ‘y’ and ‘z’ on the basis of similarities or differences ’
- A further simplified explanation to the term is ‘...typology means the classification of a phenomenon under study into some TYPES, linguistically speaking ‘Structural Types’.
- This definition of typology refers to a classification of ‘Structural types’ across languages.
- Thus, according to the definition, a language is understood to belong to a single-type, the job of the typologist is to classify languages into different types.
- We should call this kind of classification of languages as ‘Typological Classification’ on the basis of some shared features.
- ‘The Morphological Typology of languages’ is one such example of this use of the term.
- This definition is capable of introducing the basic denotation of the term ‘typology’ that it has in contemporary or modern linguistics.
- So, whether we talk about the differences or similarities amongst languages on the basis of some formal features, it will define the process as a typological study in linguistics.

# Typology of a classroom





# Typology of bookshelf





# Typology of Closet



# Typology of Purse





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- There is a basic unity that underlies the awesome diversity of the world's languages. Whether it is Apache or Zulu or Hindi or Hebrew, there are certain core structural properties that languages have in common.
- These properties, often known as language universals, allow us to say that all languages are, in some sense, the similar to one other.
- This is a huge claim, especially when confronted by the immense variations and differences in the structures of the world's languages.
- Consider the following sentences, the first from Lobala (Niger-Congo: Zaire) and the second from Hixkaryana (Carib: Brazil).

a. moto me t-a-iká mo-phé ná baphalnágá ná ntóma

man DEM NEG-3S-PST Cl-give and money and food

The man didn't give him either money or food. (Data from Morgan 1994, 133)

b. apaytara y-ari-hira nexeye wekoko

chicken 3S-take-NEG be-DPST hawk

The hawk didn't take the chicken. (Data from Derbyshire 1985, 138)

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- Despite the fact that the two sentences in (a&b) are both simple negative declarative sentences, they appear to have very little in common with each other.
- For instance, the word-order is different: The subject of the Lobala, 'moto me' ("the man") occurs at the beginning of the sentence, whereas the Hixkaryana subject wekoko ("hawk") is located at the end.
- The negation in Lobala is indicated by an auxiliary verb t-, but in Hixkaryana there is a negative suffix {-hird) on the main verb, -ari- ("take").
- Both languages exhibit verb agreement, but in Lobala the agreement suffix (-a) is found on the negative auxiliary, and it only reveals information about the subject (namely, that the subject is third-person singular).
- However, in Hixkaryana, the agreement marker is a prefix (y-) rather than a suffix.
- Furthermore, it is located on the main verb, and it reveals information about both the subject and the object (namely, that both are third-person singular).
- With regard to these differences, and many other, the concept of "language universals" may seem hard to accept.

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- Nevertheless, most linguists would claim that there is an underlying homogeneity to languages that is far more striking than differences that we discussed.
- Discovering instances of this similarity and determining why it exists, constitutes one of the major research goals of modern linguistics in general and in typology specifically.
- The consensus in linguistics about the underlying unity of language is not paralleled by agreement over how this unity can be explained or, even more fundamentally, what even constitutes an explanation for this unity.
- On this point, there are profound philosophical and methodological differences.
- For example, Noam Chomsky, perhaps the most significant figure in modern linguistics, has argued that the unity is due to human biology.
- In his view, all humans are genetically endowed with a "language faculty," which is distinct from other cognitive abilities.
- As children are exposed to the particular language (or languages) of their speech communities, this language faculty directs them in the rapid acquisition of a complex and mature grammatical system.



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- In contrast to Chomsky, other linguists have argued that the unity that underlies languages is better explained in terms of how languages are actually put to use.
- To be sure, languages are all employed for purposes like: asking questions, scolding bad behaviour, amusing friends, making comparisons, uttering facts and falsehoods, and so on.
- Because languages exist to fulfil these types of functions, it stands to argue that speakers will develop grammars that are highly effective in carrying out these purposes.
- Consequently, under the pressure of the same communicative tasks, languages evolve in such a way that they exhibit grammatical similarities.
- Language universals, under this "functional" perspective, result from commonalities in the way language is put to work.
- Which explanation for the similarities amongst languages is right?
- In all likelihood, the unity of language and consequent language universals, arises from a mixed interacting factors.
- Some of these factors can be innate, other factors may be functional, and still some others may be cognitive, social and even historical.

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- Before we proceed further to explain things that would interest us, it is important to define what ‘typology’ means in linguistics!
- In its most general sense, typology is:
- (1) ***The classification of languages or components of languages based on shared formal features (characteristics).***
- As a point of departure, it is important to note that typology is not a theory of grammar.
- Unlike Government and Binding Theory, Functional Grammar, Cognitive Grammar, Relational Grammar, typology has a goal to identify cross-linguistic patterns and correlations between these patterns.
- For this reason, the methodology and results of typological research are compatible with any grammatical theory.
- Having described something that typology is not, we now must come to understand what it is.
- There are three significant propositions packed into the dense definition in (1): (a) typology utilizes cross-linguistic comparison, (b) typology classifies languages or aspects of languages, and (c) typology examines formal features of languages.



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- These parts of the definition will be examined one by one in order to have a better understanding as to what is involved in performing language typology.
- **Proposition 1: Typology involves cross-linguistic comparison.**
- Ultimately, all typological research is based on comparisons between languages. Consider the following data for relative clause in English:
  - a. I met *the man* **who taught you French**.
  - b. *The dog* **which bit Jaggu yesterday** has become mad.
  - c. I sent the story to *the newspaper* **that your mother owns**.
- From these sentences, we could form the generalization that English **relative clauses** (in bold type) follow the **head-nouns** that they modify.
- This description is important for someone investigating English, but it is incomplete as a typological claim because it is not grounded in a cross-linguistic perspective.
- Instead, in a typological approach, we expect to find a description such as "English is **typical** in placing relative clauses after the nouns which they modify."

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- Note that the usage of a term such as "typical" properly, one must first have gathered data on relative clauses from the other languages as well and only after the cross-comparison of the data on relative clause, one must have made the above claim.
- ***Proposition 2: A typological approach involves classification of either (a) components of languages or (b) languages.***
- In the first case - classification of components of language - attention is directed toward a particular construction that arises in any language - for example, compound verb, conjunct verb, reflexive verbs, oral stops, or discourse particles.
- Then, using cross-linguistic data, all types of these specific phenomena are determined. The goal is to comprehend how one of the facets of a language operates by identifying the degree of similarity and variation that one finds among languages.
- There is also keen interest in determining whether or not there are correlations between the various patterns that one finds in a language.
- For instance, we might do a typological investigation on oral plosive sounds. These are sounds, also called "stops", that are produced when the airstream is completely closed in the vocal tract, as in English [p], [b] and [k], [g] etc.



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- If we were to examine the distribution of oral stops in the world's languages, we would immediately be struck by the fact that all languages have at least one plosive sound.
- Thus, we would have discovered a universal about sound-system in the human language up until the time when someone reports that there is a language [X] in which there is no plosive sound.
- So, the study of plosive sounds and get to know that there are about 50 plosive sounds and the dominant plosives like [p, t, k, b, d, g etc.] are very common and at least one of these is found in all reported languages.
- This kind of finding is termed as **a typological study of a component** (plosive sounds) of language.
- A second kind of typological classification has the goal of classifying entire languages into categories based on shared properties.
- One can have one language as standard of comparison such as Hindi and take any one of the varieties of Hindi such as ( Magahi, Bhojpuri, Bajjika etc.) and describe the entire variety as a typological study.
- This is the second part of 'proposition -2' that defines the characteristics of typological research in linguistics.

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- **Proposition 3: Typology is concerned with classification based on formal features of language.**
- Languages can be divided into classes on the basis of their genetic relationships. Meaning, we would group together all languages that have a common origin.
- In doing so, we would produce a set of "language families", such as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic ( even Andamanese and Nicobarese too).
- In other circumstances, we might choose to classify languages by their geographic location. We might then talk about languages spoken in Hindi-speaking belt/area or the languages spoken in North-Eastern part of India.
- In yet another situation, we might classify languages in terms of their demographic features- for example, languages with more than 100 million speakers such as Mandarin, English, Hindi, Spanish etc.
- Of course, all these methods of classification are useful devices for a particular goal. Their potential significance should be quite clear.
- However, they are not directly called the typological research. These methods of classification can be combined with typological research, but they on their own are not typological research.
- Typologists, in contrast, classify languages in terms of the 'forms out of which a language is composed or made of' such as its sounds, morphemes, syntax, or discourse structure.



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- Let us take each of these methods of classifying languages and explain the methods and their relatedness with language typology.
- When we examine the genetic relationship we come to know that there is a strong association between typological and genetic classification and it is very obvious.
- It is no surprise that Spanish and French both have articles that reveal gender or that they both have subject agreement marked on verbs because we know that both languages have inherited these traits from Latin.
- The typological similarity of these two features discussed above in these two languages is a function of their genetic association.
- The relationship between language typology and areal classification (on the basis of geographical location) has not been well understood.
- How and to what extent, the structure of one language can be affected by the languages surrounding it, is an area of intense research.
- There is plenty of evidence, however, to demonstrate that grammars are flexible enough to adopt some features of other languages that are spatially very close to them.
- The classifier '‑ṭɑ' of Bangla and its different shades in different languages of Bihar is an example of an areal influence of Bangla or people of Bihar who stayed in Bengal for long and brought this feature in their language.

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- Let us talk about the ‘demographic’ influence of language which may change of grammatical form of another language.
- If we pay attention to the structure of Hindi spoken in Delhi, we notice that there is a huge influence of features of ‘Punjabi language’ interfering even the agreement and disagreement of second person singular honorific pronoun and the verb.

- For example:

ɑj	ɑp	əpə <u>ni</u>	klas	log-e	<u>kya</u>
today	you-2SM-Hon	self-F	class-3FS	take-Imp-Fut-2MS-Non-H	what
‘Will you take your class today?’					

- Some thirty years ago, if you had spoken this sentence to your teacher, s/he would have just failed you in the course (even in JNU).
- So, this is a good example of demographic (Punjabi speakers’ outburst in Delhi) influence of Punjabi on Hindi.
- In fact, this form of pronoun and it’s wrongly conjugated verb form sounds very normal to all speakers of Hindi in Delhi now a days.
- I guess the credit goes to Bollywood! The so-called, a very rich and powerful influence of Urdu poetry on Bollywood songs have gradually taken a shift to equally rich and powerful influence of Punjabi language and its poetry!
- So, the demography too has its role in the classification of language in different group.

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- Therefore, although typological classification is a different sort of procedures than the ones in genetic, geographic, and demographic classifications, it must be recognized that the typological characteristics of languages can be greatly influenced by these factors.
  - One final point about typology's focus on **the formal features of language** requires some comments as well.
  - "Formal features" are the chunks of information that one finds in languages, their phrases, sentences, and so on.
  - These features are, of course, used to convey meaning. Consequently, typologists have always been concerned with semantic categories, such as "tense, aspect and mood", "agent, patient and theme," or "gender i.e. natural VS grammatical gender," and how these categories manifest by the **formal units of language**.
  - Therefore, the emphasis that is given in the definition of typology 'on formal features' should not be taken to exclude phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic considerations.
  - In brief, typology is not a theory of grammar, rather it is a methodology that can take any formal feature of human language from any sub-disciplines of linguistics and carry out a research which is typological in nature.
- That's all 😊