

24.945 Language Typology

This year has seen a number of important publications in language typology. Greenberg's Stanford Project on language universals has published its findings (Greenberg, Joseph H. (ed.) Universals of Human Language, four volumes, Stanford University Press, 1978) and a book of essays on typology in syntax has appeared under the editorship of Lehmann at Texas (Lehman, Winfred P. (ed.) Syntactic Typology, University of Texas Press, 1978).

Much of this work employs a methodology which gives typology a central position in linguistic theory:

data \rightarrow typology \rightarrow theory

That is, typology consists in generalizations deriving from observations of primary linguistic data, and linguistic theory consists of a model of language design deriving from a typology of the world's languages.

In this course, I will review some of this recent work, much of which is excellent and insightful, and I will argue for a somewhat different approach to typology:

data \leftrightarrow theory \rightarrow typology

Here, typology does not exist as an autonomous entity but, rather, is the product of linguistic theory.

In carrying out this plan, I will discuss certain issues in some detail, starting with certain problems relating to coreference and binding. The languages which will figure prominently at the beginning are Irish, Hopi, Navajo, Papago, and Walbiri.

Readings at the beginning will be Chapter 1 of Lehmann's Syntactic Typology and McCloskey's recent study of Irish (Transformational Syntax and Model Theoretic Semantics, Chapters 1-6 especially). Jeanne's Aspects of Hopi Grammar (esp. Chapters 3-4) and Platero's Missing Noun Phrases in Navajo will also figure in the readings at an early point in the course. These works are on reserve in the Humanities Library (Bldg. 14).

SOME RECENT VIEWS CONCERNING TYPOLOGY

I. Greenberg, Joseph, "Typology and cross-linguistic generalizations", in Greenberg (ed.) Universals of Human Language, Vol 1: Method & Theory, Stanford University Press (1978), pp. 33-59.

pp. 40-1: "... contemporary typologizing which in relation to individual languages may be called part-language typology has a 'generalizing' goal. If we typologize relative clauses, for example, the center of interest is the answer to the question: What are relative clauses like? The assignment of a language to a particular typological class becomes merely an incidental by-product and is not of great interest for its own sake. Insofar, however, as we do find empirically that there are connections among typologies so that the results for a particular language in one typology is relevant for its classification in another where the two are non-trivially different, we have advanced towards the legitimate, though difficult, goal of characterizing languages typologically in a more global way. ... There seems, at the moment, to be just one example of a typology of more than two dimensions which are sufficiently heterogeneous so that it characterizes individual languages in regard to an extensive set of interconnected attributes, namely, word order. For example, if I know that a language is VSO, it can be predicted that it will be prepositional, and such a relationship is clearly between attributes that one would a priori attribute more independence to than final and medial clusters."

p. 56: "There is a basic issue regarding typology ...: What is to count as an attribute of language? The notion of typology is broad enough to encompass a variety of responses. In every historical period, the prevailing mode of conceiving language has quite naturally and inevitably exercised an influence on typology. In the present period, the conception of language as a set of rules is prevalent as a result of the dominance of the generative approach."

p. 59: "Insofar as transformations are formulated on the basis of certain relationships among classes of sentences, alternative statements including direct reference to these data will be possible. Indeed, it will make no real difference whether one states a generalization in terms of a question-word-fronting rule or in terms of languages which have initial question-words corresponding to statements with a different word order."

II. Lehmann, Winfred, "The great underlying ground-plans", in Lehmann (ed.) Syntactic Typology, University of Texas Press (1978), pp. 3-55.

p. 5: "A taxonomy of languages might be constructed on classification of characteristic parts of speech, or shapes of words, or kinds of sounds. By contrast with these external characteristics linguistic typology is based on the analysis of patterns and principles which have been identified as central in language, such as the structure of the simple sentence and its constituents, and processes like government, modification, and subordination."

Successful typology then requires an accurate understanding of language and its elements."

p. 19: "When the constituents of the simple clause are modified, the modifications are carried out in accordance with a fundamental principle for both nominal and verbal elements (Lehmann, 1973: "A structural principle of language and its implications" Language 49.47-66). By this principle, which is given below, the central sequence, whether VO or OV, must not be interrupted. Any modifier is then placed between the modified constituent and the sentence boundary.

$$\# Q V (N^{obj}) (N^{mod}) \# \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \# Q V (N^{obj}) (N^{mod}) \# \\ \# (N^{mod}) (N^{obj}) V Q \# \end{array} \right\}$$

(where: N^{obj} = object; N^{mod} = nominal modifier; Q = qualifier = verbal modifier (neg, int, etc))

p. 31: "Linguistic theory will be adequate only when it is based on study of all types of languages. Since typology sets out to determine and explicate these, it is fundamental in the projection of theory as well as in the description of languages. If, as is generally held, language is constructed in accordance with certain fundamental rules, these should be determined by typological study."

p. 43-4: "In surveying languages for such features [of arrangement and modification], typological study has yielded major contributions to general grammatical theory, for it has made clear the segment of grammar which is indeed universal, and has disclosed guidelines for its patterning. Among these guidelines is the observation that the basic patterns in the universal segment of grammar must be unordered. While one may assume that sentences will contain verbs and objects, their arrangement is determined not by universals but by typologically specific rules. One kind of grammar positing unordered underlying rules has been labeled case grammar

1. $\Sigma \rightarrow$ Conjunction Σ^n (optional: $n \geq 2$)
2. $\Sigma \rightarrow$ Q(ualifier) P(roposition)
3. $Q \rightarrow$ [\pm Declarative] [\pm Interrogative] [\pm Negative] ...
4. $P \rightarrow$ V (K) (K = abstract 'actant' categories: target, receptor, agent, means, time, place, source, manner)
5. $K \rightarrow$ { NP k^n }
 { Σ }
6. $NP \rightarrow$ (Det) N (Σ) (optional).

p. 50: "The deep structures [of generative grammar are] ... far removed from a universal, innate pattern. Typological study by contrast takes into account all languages, and accordingly it leads to a deep structure which is indeed universal. Whether or not that proposed [above] is adequate ... it has the merit of accounting for all known languages."