Variability of languages in time and space

Lecture 2:
Classification of the world’s languages

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October 15, 2019
• Similarities and differences between languages
  • Seeking explanations
• Approaches to language classification
  1 Genetic classification
  2 Areal typology
  3 Language typology
• Similarities and differences between languages
  • Seeking explanations

• Approaches to language classification
  1. Genetic classification
  2. Areal typology
  3. Language typology
Languages of the world do share some features, but display differences at the same time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>En.</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Czech</th>
<th>Slovene</th>
<th>Croatian</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>Vater</td>
<td>otec</td>
<td>oče</td>
<td>otac</td>
<td>père</td>
<td>padre</td>
<td>padre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- WHY are they similar?
- WHY do they differ?
Seeking explanations

Some similarities can be explained by the **common origin** of languages.

<table>
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- languages that developed from the same ancestor language and belong to the same **language family** share common features
  - English and German belong to **Germanic** languages
  - Czech, Slovene, and Croatian to **Slavic** languages
  - French, Spanish and Italian to **Romance** languages

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Variability of languages
But what about similarities between unrelated languages? They can result from **language contact**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>En.</th>
<th>Czech</th>
<th>Basque</th>
<th>Swahili</th>
<th>Maori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pepper</td>
<td>pepř</td>
<td>piperra</td>
<td>pilipili</td>
<td>pepa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The country of origin of black pepper is south India. The origin of the word can be found in Sanskrit pippali. The merchants from India distributed to other countries not only spice but also its name. In this way languages got in touch, in contact.” (Körvélyessy 2017:80)
- Similarities and differences between languages
  - Seeking explanations
- Approaches to language classification
  1. Genetic classification
  2. Areal typology
  3. Language typology
• Similarities and differences between languages
  • Seeking explanations
• Approaches to language classification
  1. Genetic classification
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  3. Language typology
Classification of languages

Similarities and differences among languages explained
  • by the origin of languages
    → genetic classification
  • by language contact
    → areal typology

Both perspectives can be taken into account within classification based on linguistic analysis of structural features of languages
  → language typology
Languages that display systematic similarities and differences are assumed to have descended from a common source language = ancestor language / proto-language.

- regular correspondences between languages studied by comparative methods
- proto-languages not attested, they are reconstructed from available documents of the descendent languages
Language family
is a group of languages that have developed from the same proto-language.

- language families represented as trees
### Major language families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lang. family</th>
<th>lang.</th>
<th>mil. of speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger-Congo</td>
<td>1,527</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austronesian</td>
<td>1,224</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-New Guinea</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sino-Tibetan</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>3,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Asiatic</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- plus another 146 language families
proto-language: Proto-Indo-European (PIE)

- reconstructed on the basis of Sanskrit, Ancient Greek, Latin, and others
- assumed existence: 4,500–2,500 B.C.E.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
<td>asmi</td>
<td>asi</td>
<td>asti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>eimi</td>
<td>essi</td>
<td>esti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>sum</td>
<td>es</td>
<td>est</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>im</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>ist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language families are subdivided into smaller groups. However, there is consensus neither on granularity (number of levels) nor on terminology.

- for instance:
  - *language family*
  - — *language group (branch)*
  - —— *language subgroup (subbranch)*
  - ——— *individual language*
from the Indo-European family to Czech:

- the Indo-European language family subsumes several groups, e.g. Germanic, Italic, Indo-Iranian, **Slavic** languages
- the group of Slavic languages is divided into the subgroups of East, South, and **West Slavic** languages
- the subgroup of West Slavic Languages involves Czech, Slovak, Polish etc.

**levels distinguished here:**

- *language family*: Indo-European
- — *language group*: Slavic language
- —— *language subgroup*: West Slavic language
- ——— *individual language*: Czech

*vs.* Ethnologue and WALS on the next slides
Language classification in *Ethnologue*

- multiple-level classification of languages
  - language family
    - sub-family
    - group
    - subgroup
    - sub-subgroup
    - individual language
- classification of **Slavic** languages
  - Indo-European lang. family
    - Balto-Slavic sub-family
    - group: Slavic lang.
    - subgroups: East, South, West
    - e.g. sub-subgroups of South Slav. lang.: Eastern, West.
    - 20 Slavic languages in total
three-level genetic classification of languages:

- language family
  - genus
  - individual language

classification of Slavic languages:

- Indo-European family
  - genus: Slavic languages
  - 17 individual Slavic languages in total
## 20 Slavic languages in *Ethnologue* vs 17 Slavic lang. in *WALS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnologue</th>
<th>WALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belarusian</td>
<td>Belorussian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>Macedonian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnian</td>
<td>Bosnian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>Serbian-Croatian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovene</td>
<td>Slovene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>Czech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>Slovak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashubian</td>
<td>Kashubian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>Polish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Sorbian</td>
<td>Lower Sorbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Sorbian</td>
<td>Upper Sorbian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ethnologue* only:
- Croatian
- Montenegrin
- Church Slavonic
- Slavomolisano
- Silesian
- Rusyn

*WALS* only:
- Sorbian
- Polabian
- Slovincian

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Variability of languages
Language isolates

- natural languages that cannot be assigned to any language family
- assumed to be remnants of families
- e.g. Basque, Ainu (Japan)
Languages that are geographically in contact may influence each other

- based on the regional location of languages
- without respect to their genetic classification
- speakers of the languages interact and influence each other
  - pronunciation
  - grammatical constructions
  - borrowing of words
Sprachbund is a group of languages that
- are genetically unrelated, or only distantly related (do not belong to the same family or, at least, to the same genus),
- are spoken in the same region, and
- have developed similar features.

How many shared features required for a sprachbund?
- from the minimum of one feature common to two languages (Haspelmath 2001) to many features shared by many languages
Balkan sprachbund

Greek, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian, Albanian, Turkish etc.

- e.g. in spite of being genetically not related, the languages have developed postponement of articles as a common feature:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>language</th>
<th>‘woman’ – ‘the woman’</th>
<th>‘man’ – ‘the man’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>жена — жената</td>
<td>мъж — мъжът</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>femeie — fememia</td>
<td>bărbat — bărbatul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>grua — gruaja</td>
<td>burrë — burri</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Variability of languages
Language typology

- language typology / linguistic typology

Körtvélyessy (2017:2):

“Language typology is a system or study that divides languages into smaller groups according to similar properties they have. [...] These smaller groups are called language types.”
a **holistic approach** to language typology

“The classification of languages into language types attempts to ‘match’ the complete language system with one language type.” (Körtvélyessy 2017:2)

a **partial approach** to language typology

“the classification is based on the analysis of a selected language construction and/or phenomenon (not the entire language), for example the size of the consonantal inventory, the presence vs. absence of articles in language, the order of words in a sentence etc.” (Körtvélyessy 2017:2)
A language universal is a feature that all languages have, or a statement that holds for all languages, or less strictly (more commonly), a feature or statement that holds for a majority of languages.

- morphological and syntactic universals listed in the *Universals Archive*
  http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro
Typological classification is based on the study of structural and functional features at particular levels of the language system. morphological features
do morphological features
do morphology covers both inflectional and derivational features
do derivation also as one of word-formation processes

lexical features

syntactic features
Typological approach to phonology covers the following questions:

- How many vowels and consonants are used in the language?
- Which features do they have?
- How are syllable formed in the language?
- Which prosodic features are employed in the language?
Language typology: Morphological typology

Typological approach to morphology includes, for instance, the following questions:

- Are grammatical categories conveyed by morphemes, auxiliaries, and/or by word order?
- How many morphological cases are available in the language?

In holistic approaches to morphological typology, several language types discerned:

1. analytic – isolating
2. synthetic – agglutinating
3. synthetic – inflectional
4. polysynthetic
5. introflective
Language typology of word formation

Examples of questions asked:

- Which word-formation processes are available in a language to coin new words?
- How frequent are particular word-formation processes in a language?
- How are things/abstract phenomena/actions named in a language?
Examples of questions asked:

- How are the same objects or actions named in particular languages?
- – esp. body parts, colour terms, weather terms, motion verbs
- What meanings can be expressed by a single word in the language?
Typological approach to syntactic features:

- How are sentence elements ordered in a linear sequence (sentence)?
  - focus on three main elements: subject, verb, object
  - the order of the elements analysed in simple indicative sentences
References


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