

Variability of languages in time and space

Lecture 2: Classification of the world's languages

Magda Ševčíková

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- Similarities and differences between languages
 - Seeking explanations
- Approaches to language classification
 - 1 Genetic classification
 - 2 Areal typology
 - 3 Language typology

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Similarities and differences between languages

Languages of the world do share some features, but display differences at the same time.

En.	German	Czech	Slovene	Croatian	French	Spanish	Italian
<i>father</i>	<i>Vater</i>	<i>otec</i>	<i>oče</i>	<i>otac</i>	<i>père</i>	<i>padre</i>	<i>padre</i>

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

Seeking explanations

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

En.	German	Czech	Slovene	Croatian	French	Spanish	Italian
father	Vater	otec	oče	otac	père	padre	padre

- 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

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

En.	Czech	Basque	Swahili	Maori
<i>pepper</i>	<i>pepř</i>	<i>piperra</i>	<i>pilipili</i>	<i>pepa</i>

“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)

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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.

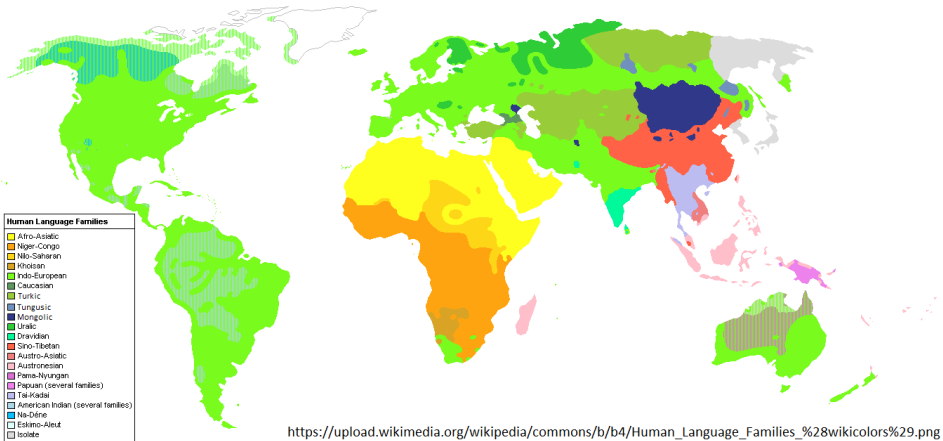
- language families represented as trees

Major language families

lang. family	lang.	mil. of speakers
Niger-Congo	1,527	511
Austronesian	1,224	324
Trans-New Guinea	479	3.5
Sino-Tibetan	453	1,370
Indo-European	444	3,090
Afro-Asiatic	366	496

- plus another 146 language families

Language families around the world



Indo-European language family tree

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.

Sanskrit	asmi	asi	asti
Greek	eimi	essi	esti
Latin	sum	es	est
Gothic	im	is	ist



Sub-classification of language families

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*

Sub-classification example (text books on Czech)

- 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

- 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*

<i>Ethnologue</i>	<i>WALS</i>
Belarusian	Belorussian
Russian	Russian
Ukrainian	Ukrainian
Bulgarian	Bulgarian
Macedonian	Macedonian
Bosnian	Bosnian
Serbian	Serbian-Croatian
Slovene	Slovene
Czech	Czech
Slovak	Slovak
Kashubian	Kashubian
Polish	Polish
Lower Sorbian	Lower Sorbian
Upper Sorbian	Upper Sorbian

Ethnologue only:

- Croatian
- Montenegrin
- Church Slavonic
- Slavomolisano
- Silesian
- Rusyn

WALS only:

- Sorbian
- Polabian
- Slovincian

Slavic languages



- 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

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:

language	'woman' – 'the woman'	'man' – 'the man'
Bulgarian	жена – жената	мъж – мъжът
Romanian	femeie – fememia	bărbat – bărbatul
Albanian	grua – grua ja	burrë – burri

- 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.
 - phonological features
 - morphological features
 - morphology covers both inflectional and derivational features
 - 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 syllables formed in the language?
 - Which prosodic features are employed in the language?

- 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

- 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

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