Variability of languages in time and space

Lecture 1: Basic facts and linguistic resources on the world’s languages

Magda Ševčíková

September 29, 2021
1. Basic facts
2. Variability of languages
3. Linguistic resources on the world’s languages
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3. Linguistic resources on the world’s languages
The number of languages in printed and online resources:

- *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911): app. 1,000 lang.

- not an increase in the number of languages, but rather steadily improving documentation efforts
A first language (L1)
is a language which a person acquires first in her/his life, usually naturally as a child.

A second language (L2)
is a language which a person acquires next to her/his first language.
A living language

has at least one speaker for whom it is a first language.

- e.g. English, Catalan, Japanese, Swahili, French Sign Language

- distinguished from dead languages

  - a dead language is no longer the native language of any community but is still in use, e.g. Latin

- a more subtle insight provided by the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS; Lewis & Simons 2010)

  - from internationally used languages to extinct languages
### Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS)

[https://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status](https://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of a nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wider Communication</td>
<td>The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Vigorous</td>
<td>The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Shifting</td>
<td>The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Moribund</td>
<td>The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Nearly Extinct</td>
<td>The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dormant</td>
<td>The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Extinct</td>
<td>The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In maps at *ethnologue.com*, each language is located in its *primary country*

- each language shown *just once*, e.g.
  - English located in the United Kingdom
  - Esperanto located in Poland
Languages by region of origin

*Ethnologue* (2018):
- 2,300 languages (out of 7,097) are from Asia
- 2,143 languages are concentrated in Africa
- 288 languages belong to Europe

Variability of languages

https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/how-many-languages
Languages by region and by size (number of L1 speakers)

Languages

Europe (yellow): 288 languages
America (green): 4.015B speakers
Pacific (orange): 7M speakers

Africa (blue): 2,143 languages
Europe (yellow): 2,300 languages

Note: English listed as a language belonging to Europe. Therefore, all L1 speakers of English (e.g. incl. English speakers living in the USA) categorized under Europe.
Languages by number of L1 speakers

- nearly 7,900,000,000 speakers around the world
  - nearly 90% of speakers use languages from Asia or Europe as L1
  - 40% of speakers use one of just 5 languages as L1
    - Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic
Number of L1 speakers vs. of L2 speakers

Languages with the most native speakers

- Mandarin Chinese
- Spanish
- English
- Hindi

Languages with the most speakers

- English
- Mandarin Chinese
- Hindi
- Spanish

Blue: Native Speakers  Light Blue: Other Speakers
1. Basic facts
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Variability of languages

- Languages share some features and differ in others
  - due to a common origin
  - due to mutual contact
- Language typology compares
  - phonological features
  - morphology: inflections and word-formation
  - syntax
- Spoken vs written language
- Sociolinguistic aspects
- Stylistics
Similarities and differences between languages

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>
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<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?

- common origin → genetic classification
- language contact → areal typology
- common structural features → language / linguistic typology
Some similarities can be explained by the **common origin** of languages.

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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>En.</th>
<th>Czech</th>
<th>Basque</th>
<th>Swahili</th>
<th>Maori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<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)
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 in pronunciation, grammatical constructions, and borrowing of words.

<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 – жена\textipa{ta}</td>
<td>мъж – мъжът</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>femeie – fememia</td>
<td>бărbat – bărbaţul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>grua – gruaja</td>
<td>burrë – burri</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.”

- 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 consonantantal inventory, the presence vs. absence of articles in language, the order of words in a sentence etc.”
Typological classification is based on the study of structural and functional features at particular levels of the language system.

Typological approach to phonology:
- 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

- 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

- 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?
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
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
Spoken vs written communication

- What syntactic structures can we expect in spoken communication?
- What is the density of information in spoken in written text?
- How is written text encoded (writing systems)?
• How do we choose from varieties of a language?
• How is the usage of languages / varieties connected with social variables (age, nationality, education...)?
• What is the speakers’ relation to the language norm?
Stylistics: possibility of choice

- What are the features of different language registers (e.g., in administration, media, informal talk)?
- What are the features of text genres (e.g., formal letter, joke, detective story)?
- What is the usual setting of information in different text genres?
1. Basic facts
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Online resources on the world’s languages

- *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*
  - [http://www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)

  - [http://wals.info](http://wals.info)

- **APiCS – Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures**
  - [http://apics-online.info](http://apics-online.info)

- **WOLD – The World Loanword Database**
  - [http://wold.clld.org](http://wold.clld.org)

- For other resources see e.g.
  - [https://linguistic-typology.org/databases/](https://linguistic-typology.org/databases/)

- database of phonological, grammatical and lexical properties of languages
  - obtained from reference grammars and other descriptive material
- 55 authors
  - Greville G. Corbett, Martin Haspelmath, Bernard Comrie, Matthew S. Dryer et al.
- editions
  - 1st version 2005
    - book with CD-ROM, Oxford University Press
  - 1st online version (WALS Online) 2008
    - a separate publication of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
  - current version from 2013
    - http://wals.info
Linguistic features in WALS

- 144 features in total
  - structural properties of language that describe “one aspect of linguistic diversity”
  - concise linguistic description of each feature
  - 2 to 28 values of the feature
  - assigned to one of 11 areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phonology</th>
<th>nominal syntax</th>
<th>lexicon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>morphology</td>
<td>simple clauses</td>
<td>sign languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nominal categories</td>
<td>complex sentences</td>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbal categories</td>
<td>word order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- distribution of the feature values on the map
WALS feature 33A: Coding of Nominal Plurality

Values

- Plural prefix: 126
- Plural suffix: 513
- Plural stem change: 6
- Plural tone: 4
- Plural complete reduplication: 8
- Mixed morphological plural: 60
- Plural word: 170
- Plural clitic: 81
- No plural: 98

Variability of languages

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## Description of languages in WALS

**WALS code: dut**

### Language Dutch

Showing 1 to 89 of 89 entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fld</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14A</td>
<td>No fixed stress</td>
<td>Fixed Stress Locations</td>
<td>Kager 1989; Trommelen and Zonneveld 1999a; van der Hulst 1984</td>
<td>Phonology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15A</td>
<td>Right-oriented: One of the last three</td>
<td>Weight-Sensitive Stress</td>
<td>Kager 1989; Trommelen and Zonneveld 1999a; van der Hulst 1984</td>
<td>Phonology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16A</td>
<td>Coda consonant</td>
<td>Weight Factors in Weight-Sensitive Stress Systems</td>
<td>Kager 1989; Trommelen and Zonneveld 1999a; van der Hulst 1984</td>
<td>Phonology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17A</td>
<td>Trochaic</td>
<td>Rhythm Types</td>
<td>Kager 1989; Trommelen and Zonneveld 1999a; van der Hulst 1984</td>
<td>Phonology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26A</td>
<td>Strongly suffixing</td>
<td>Prefixing vs. Suffixing in</td>
<td>Koohoven 1968</td>
<td>Morphology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Spoken in:** Netherlands

**Alternative names**

- **Ruhlen:** Dutch
- **Routledge:** Netherlandic
- **Ethnologue:** Dutch

**Sources**


other online resources:

- https://www.linguisticsociety.org
- http://www.linguistic-typology.org
- https://www.omniglot.com
- www.uis.unesco.org