World Atlas of Language Structures

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February 22, 2024
Multilingual Natural Language Processing

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Variability of Languages in Time and Space

• NPFL100
• Sister course of this one
  • You have attended ⇒ advantage
  • You haven’t ⇒ no disaster… but take it next year :-) 
• They: more linguistics, less computation
• We: less linguistics, more computation
  • … today is an exception :-)
Why Multilingual Processing?

• A blatantly incomplete study:
  • ACL main conference proceedings
  • Paper title contains “parsing”

• ACL-COLING 1998 (Montréal, Canada) 
  • 9 papers
  • 3 languages: English (4×), Spanish (1×), German (1×)
  • 4× no evaluation/language
  • English often implicitly, without mentioning it!
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- ACL 2007 (Praha, Czechia)
  - 12 papers
  - 13 languages: en (7×), de (3×); ar, cs, da, eu, ja, nl, pt, sl, sv, zh
  - Max 8 langs/paper; average 1.9 langs/paper
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- ACL 2016 (Berlin, Germany) 🇩🇪
  - 24 papers
  - 24 languages: en (18×), de (6×), zh (5×); ar, bg, ca, cs, da, el, es, eu, fr, he, hu, it, ja, ko, ml, nl, pl, pt, sl, sv, tr
  - Max 18 langs/paper; average 3.1 langs/paper
Why Multilingual Processing?

- Trend:
  - No evaluation on data
  - Evaluation on English (usually Penn Treebank)
    - Rarely something else
    - But usually one language per paper
  - Evaluation on multiple languages
    - Still skewed towards a few families
    - “Big languages” of Eurasia
      - Indo-European, Uralic, Turkic, Semitic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean
  - Resource-poor languages
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• Is my algorithm language-independent?
  • Not likely!
  • Test on 4 IE languages does not prove it!
  • Many families missing or underrepresented
  • Some with hundreds of millions of speakers (Austronesian, Niger-Congo)
  • Those languages behave quite differently!
How Many Languages?

- Often cited: 7000 (Ethnologue / SIL)
  - Criticized (Dixon): SIL’s aim is translating the Bible
  - Language vs. dialect? Living vs. extinct?
- More realistic: about 4000?
- Many of them endangered
Language Codes

- ISO standard (paid; but unofficial lists are easily obtainable)
- ISO 639-1: two-letter; only major languages
- ISO 639-2: three-letter; more languages; a mess, don’t use :-)  
  - T-codes: ces, deu, fra, nld, zho, ...
  - B-codes: cze, ger, fre, dut, chi, ...
  - group codes: sla (Slavic), ine (Indo-European), ...
- ISO 639-3: three-letter  
  - copy from 639-2/T if exists  
  - for other languages: Ethnologue  
  - special: mul (multiple langs), mis (langs without code), und (undetermined/unknown), zxx  
    (no linguistic content, e.g. animal sounds)
- Some people/tools use always 639-3
- RFC4646: use 639-1 if available, use three-letter otherwise (e.g. Wiki)

- Glottolog codes: four letters + four digits  
  - 8475 entries (http://glottolog.org/glottolog/language)
Number of Genders
WALS: Is It Useful for NLP?

• Yes!
• Database of language features is downloadable
  • Currently 192 features (WALS chapters)
• Similar languages – needed in cross-lingual projection
• But not all features are helpful everywhere!
  • We process text
  • Features 1A to 19A are about phonology
    • E.g. 1A: Consonant Inventories = Moderately small
  • Features 129 to 138 are about lexicon
  • Those that matter may not all have the same weight
• Some features are useful but sparsely annotated
  • Writing system: only indicated for 5 languages
Gender in WALS

• Lexical category of nouns
• Agreement or cross-reference elsewhere:
  • Pronouns
  • Adjectives, determiners (inflection)
  • Verbs (inflection)
  • ... or a subset thereof

• Data:
  • Ukrainian and Russian: 3 genders (not 4, with animacy)
  • Czech and Slovak not shown at all
  • English: 3 genders; although only in pronouns!
  • 2 is more similar to 4 than 0 is to 2
Potentially Important Features

- Word order features (18)
- Verbal person marking (4)
- Locus of marking (head marking vs. dependent marking)
- Case (7)
- Endemic function words
  - Copula
  - Question particles in polar questions
SIGTYP 2020 Shared Task

• Prediction of typological features
• https://sigtyp.github.io/st2020.html

⇒ ÚFAL team (from this course) won the task!
• https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/2020.sigtyp-1.4/
Other Typological Databases

- Grambank (https://grambank.clld.org/)
- ... to be expanded ...