LINGUIST 168 Introduction to Linguistic Typology

Lecture 1: What is typology

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Plan for today

Administrative details

- Introductions
- Course format
- Assignments & deadlines

Introduction: What is typology

- Object of study
- Goals of typology
- Important terminology

Introductions

- Ksenia Ershova (she/her)

- PhD from the University of Chicago

- Fieldworker, syntactician/morphologist

- Native languages: English and Russian

- Studied languages: Georgian, Arabic, French

- Fieldwork languages: West & East Circassian, Samoan

- Favorite hobby: my dog!

Activity

Message "hi" into the chat.

Introduce yourself:

- Name

- Year & major

- Preferred pronouns

- Linguistic subfield you're most interested in

- Languages

- Favorite hobby

Administrative Details

FORMAT OF THE CLASS & SYLLABUS

Class participation (15% of grade)

On Canvas:

- Discussion post on assigned reading (2-4 sentences):
  - › Most interesting thing
  - › Question

Readings:

- Velupillai, Viveka (2012) An Introduction to Linguistic Typology. John Benjamins. (digital access via Stanford Library)
- Additional readings with links or uploaded to Canvas

Lecture attendance:

- Not strictly enforced
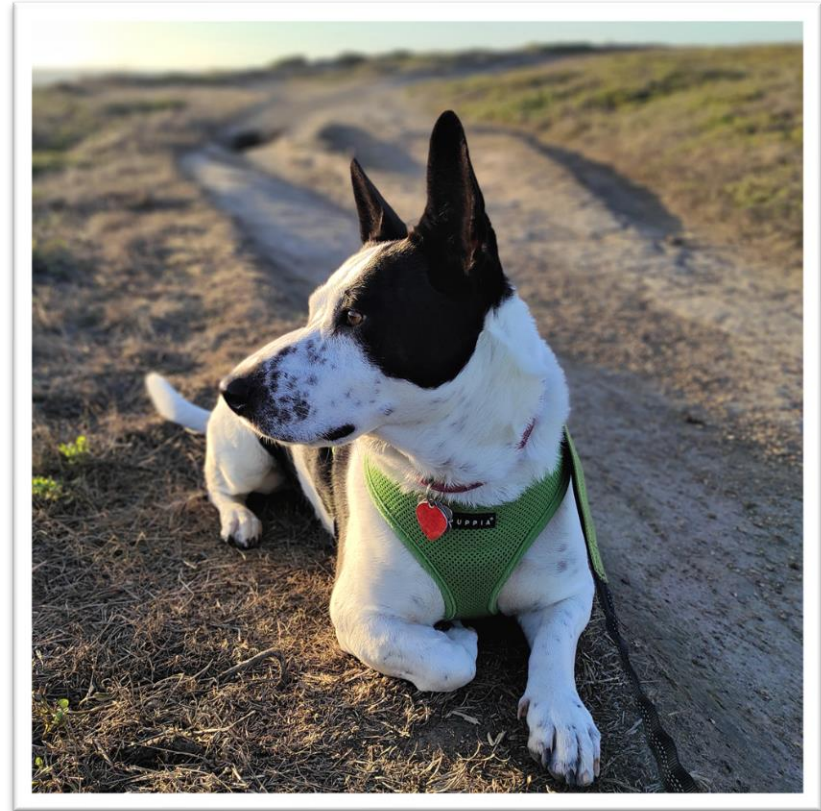- Let me know if synchronous attendance is a problem

Format of the class

To make online experience easier:

- If possible, keep your video on.

- Keep yourself muted, except when talking.

- Questions any time, but expect delay:

  › In chat

  › Raise hand

- Participate in occasional pop quizzes & breakout rooms.

Please be prepared for:

- Connection issues

- Technical glitches

- Background noise

- My dog

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Questions?

On class format, readings, & participation

Assignments (70% of grade)

General information:

- Due every Monday before class

- Submit in Assignments tab on Canvas

- Optional bonus assignment can replace lowest grade

Requirements:

- Collaboration must be acknowledged

- Contact me if cannot meet due date

Questions?

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Final assignment (for 4 units / 15% of grade)

General information:

- Due Week 11 (see syllabus for exact dates)

- Submit in Assignments tab on Canvas

Details:

- Provided: dataset from "Language X"

- Write up typologically informed description

- To be discussed in more detail closer to deadline

Questions?

Your homework for Wednesday

1. Fill out questionnaire:
    https://canvas.stanford.edu/courses/136730/pages/ling168-student-survey

2. Reading: Velupillai 2012, Ch. 2

3. Canvas discussion post on reading

What is linguistic typology?

- Object of study
- Goals
- Terminology

Linguistic typology

The study of classifying languages based on their similarities and differences.

How different can languages be?

- ~7000 languages

- About 2/3 are understudied

- An even smaller portion is represented in mainstream theoretical linguistics

Activity

Compare

You   saw   me.   **English**

Na   va'ai   e   oe   a'u.   **Samoan**
PAST   see   ERG you   me.

se   we   sə-   p-   ɬeʁʷə   -ʁ   **West**
I   you   1SG-   2SG- see   -PAST   **Circassian**

Questions?

What is linguistic typology?

- Object of study   **differences and similarities between languages**
- Goals
- Terminology

Why typology?

The big picture: **Why be a typologist?**

- Comparing differences and similarities between languages will lead to understanding **what language is**

How to define language abstractly?

What are traits that all languages share?

- Finding **universal tendencies** can help understand human cognition more generally

Why is type X so common?

Why is type Y so rare?

Why don't we ever see a combination of traits A & B in a language?

Why typology?

The smaller picture: **Why study typology?**

- Systematic understanding of existing language types helps in study of new languages

How can I describe language X?

What sorts of things can I expect to find in language X?

If language X has construction B, what else might I find?

Does my explanation for X make sense? Does this happen in other languages?

- Typological classification are useful descriptive tools

E.g. language X is type A for word order; type B for morphology; type C for case

What's in it for you?

- Learn what's out there

- Acquire practical skills for language study and analysis

- Narrow down interests by subfield

Questions?

Activity

- English and Russian both have SVO word order:

S (subject)	V (verb)	O (object)
The cat	caught	the mouse.
Koška	pojmala	myšku.
cat	caught	mouse

- Imagine you know nothing about their history or geography.
- **What are some possible reasons for this similarity?**

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Narrowing down typology

Why languages might be similar:

- they have a common ancestor   **Historical linguistics**

E.g. Russian and English are both Indo-European

- one influenced the other because of proximity   **Contact linguistics**

E.g. Russian and Finnish have historically been in contact.

- they developed same property independently   **Linguistic typology**

E.g. Russian and Vietnamese both have SVO word order.

They are not related and are not in contact.

Narrowing down typology

Why languages might be similar:

- they have a common ancestor

E.g. Russian and English are both Indo-European

Historical linguistics

- one influenced the other because of proximity

E.g. Russian and Finnish have historically been in contact.

Contact linguistics

- **they developed same property independently**

E.g. Russian and Vietnamese both have SVO word order.
They are not related and are not in contact.

Why is this scenario interesting to a linguist?

Why are "arbitrary" similarities interesting?

Questions?

What is linguistic typology?

- Object of study: **differences and similarities between languages**
- Goals: **determine the distribution of common properties across languages of the world**

- Terminology

Key components of typological analysis

- Types

- Universals

Linguistic types

- Main method of classifying languages in typology

- Certain linguistic properties tend to co-occur

- If combination of properties is common cross-linguistically, it can be labeled a **type**

- Practical use: simple label denotes a list of properties

- Theoretical significance: potential for generalization and predictive power

Example: word order

S　　**V**　　**O**

You　　saw　　me.　　　　　　　**English**

　　　　　V　　　**S**　　　**O**

Na　　　va'ai　　　e　oe　　a'u.　　**Samoan**

PAST　　　see　　　ERG you　　I.

S　**O**　　　　　　**V**

se　we　　sə-　　p-　　ɬeʁʷə　-ʁ

I　　you　　1SG-　2SG-　see　　-PAST　　**West Circassian**

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Questions?