

LINGUIST 168 Introduction to Linguistic Typology

LECTURE 4-5: METHODOLOGY, CONTINUED
LEXICAL TYPOLOGY

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Plan for today

- Questions about previous lectures or homework
- Wrapping up with methodology
- Questions about readings
- Lexical typology

How to assemble a balanced sample

Strategy 3 (Dryer 1989):

- languages are grouped into genera (sing. genus)

Genus = group of related languages that can be traced back to an ancestor ~2500 years ago.

E.g. Romance (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.) and Germanic (English, German, Dutch, Icelandic, etc.)

- genera grouped into five large geographic regions

Africa, Eurasia, Australia & New Guinea, North America, and South America

- a statistically significant tendency must be observed **in most genera in every geographic region**

Pro: avoids geographic or genetic bias

Activity

In groups, discuss cons of one of the sampling strategies below.

Things to consider

- Size of sample:
 - › the larger the sample, the harder to manage
 - › the smaller the sample, the less representative
- Balance: does this strategy meet our goal of identifying tendencies
 - › independent of geography
 - › independent of genetics
 - › independent of culture
- Difficulties in accurate sampling: recall that 2/3 of languages are under-described in all aspects, including genetic affiliation, culture, and language contact

Questions?

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Questions about readings

- Monomorphemic versus polymorphemic

English *thumb*

Russian *bol'shoj palets* (= big finger)

Samoan *limamatua* (= lima + matua = finger + parent)

} polymorphemic

Questions about readings

- Does typology treat languages as static?

synchronic vs diachronic



language
as static
system



language
change

Questions?

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Lexical typology

- object of study
- criteria for partitioning the world
- decomposing lexical meaning
- mapping lexical meaning

How we partition the world

Lexical typology is a sub-discipline of **semantic typology**.

Semantic typology identifies generalizations in the expression of **meaning** across languages.

Lexical typology

identifies tendencies and universals in how languages conceptualize and partition the world,
specifically in the domain of lexical meaning.

Lexical meaning

- meaning of **content words**
- **Content words** ≈ words for concrete, specific concepts

Examples: open, wind, door, play, carefully

- Contrast with **function words**

≈ words with abstract, general meaning, or only grammatical function

Examples: some, the, at, it

Content versus function words

- Content words are open class:
 - new words can be easily added to denote novel concepts
 - to Zoom with someone*
 - doomscrolling*
 - maskne*
- Function words are closed class:
 - new words are rarely added and only with deliberate, conscious effort

Activity

- Lexical typology is primarily concerned with the meaning of open class words.
- Parts-of speech can be sorted into open or closed classes.

E.g. nouns are open class:

computer, postdoc, freegan

Articles are closed class:

the, a, an

→ poll

Object of study

Lexical typology identifies tendencies and universals in how languages conceptualize and partition the world, based on the **meaning of content words**.

Lexical typology

- object of study
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- decomposing lexical meaning
- mapping lexical meaning

trends and universals in the meaning of content words

Disclaimer

- semantics has been notoriously difficult to systematize
 - › due to the complexity and nuance of meanings
 - › and dependence on context

“You should leave now.”

→ command or suggestion, depending on

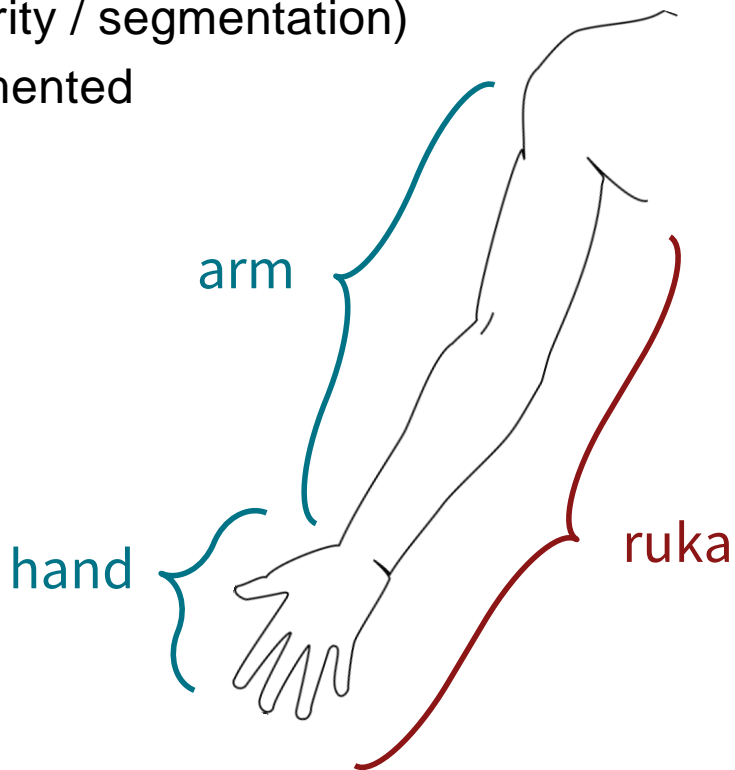
- 1.combination of speaker and addressee
 - 2.surrounding linguistic and real-world context
 - 3.intonation
- we’re talking about (a subset of) lexical typology because
 - › it is most easily conceptualized
 - › it is readily observable without significant linguistic background

Dimensions of partitioning the world

Partonomy (= granularity / segmentation)

how something is segmented
into smaller units

English



Russian

Hand and arm

Value	Representation
● Identity: a single word denotes both 'hand' and 'arm'	228
● Differentiation: one word denotes 'hand' and another, different word denotes 'arm'	389
Total:	617

Brown 2013a. <https://wals.info/chapter/129>

Partonomy

palets
finger

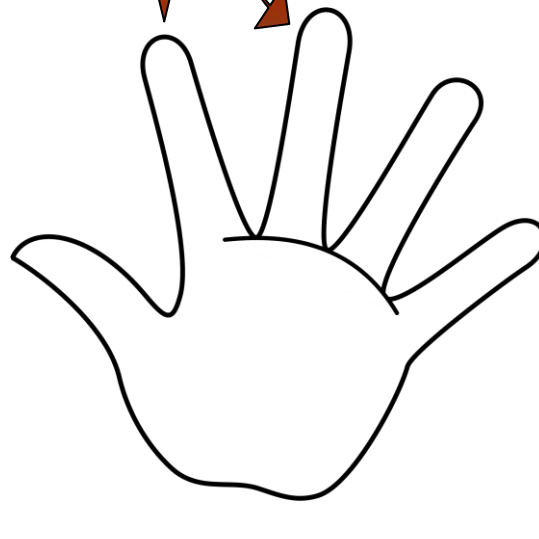
English

Russian

rdaka

hand
ruka

Warlpiri



Hand and finger

Value	Representation
● Identity: a single word denotes both 'hand' and 'finger' and/or 'fingers'	72
● Differentiation: one word denotes 'hand' and another, different word denotes 'finger' (or, very rarely, 'fingers')	521
Total:	593

Brown 2013b. <https://wals.info/chapter/130>

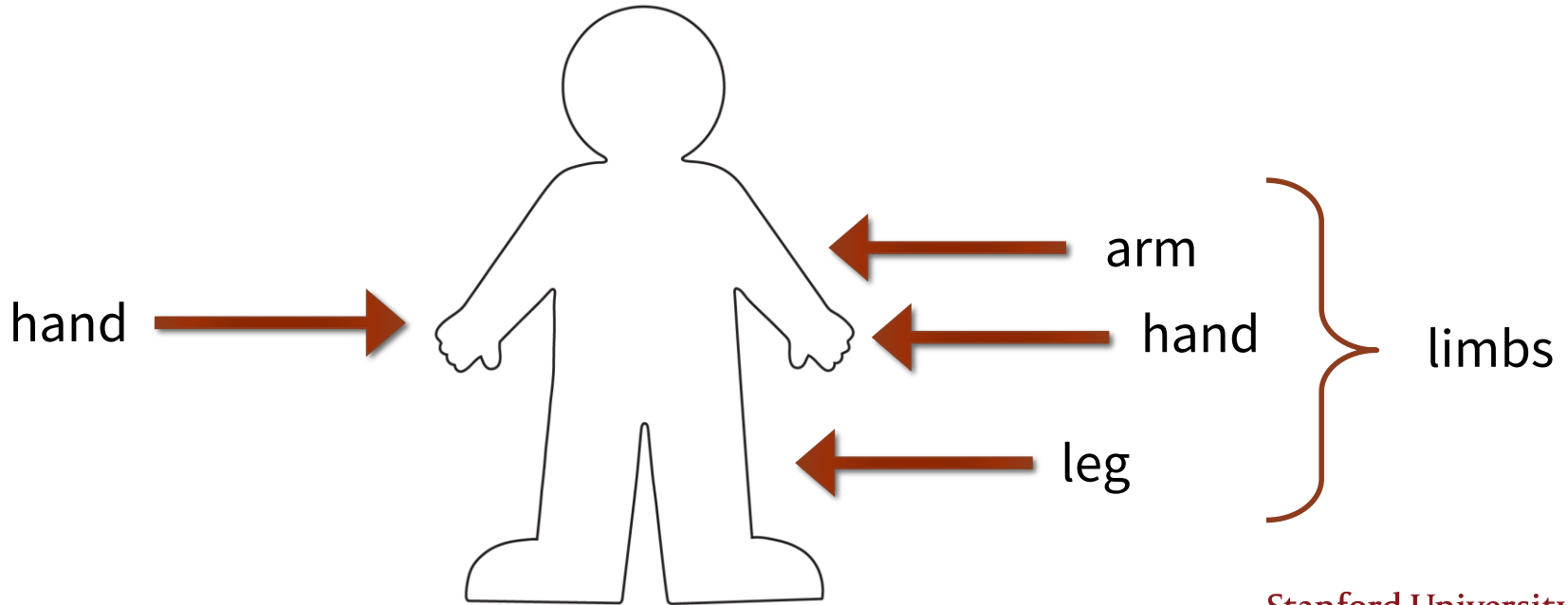
Generalizations about segmenting the body

- All languages have a word for 'body'.
- All languages have a distinct term for the upper limb, i.e. 'arm' (and 'hand').
- In all languages that have a separate term for 'leg' (as opposed to 'foot'), there is also a term for 'arm' (as opposed to 'hand').

Questions?

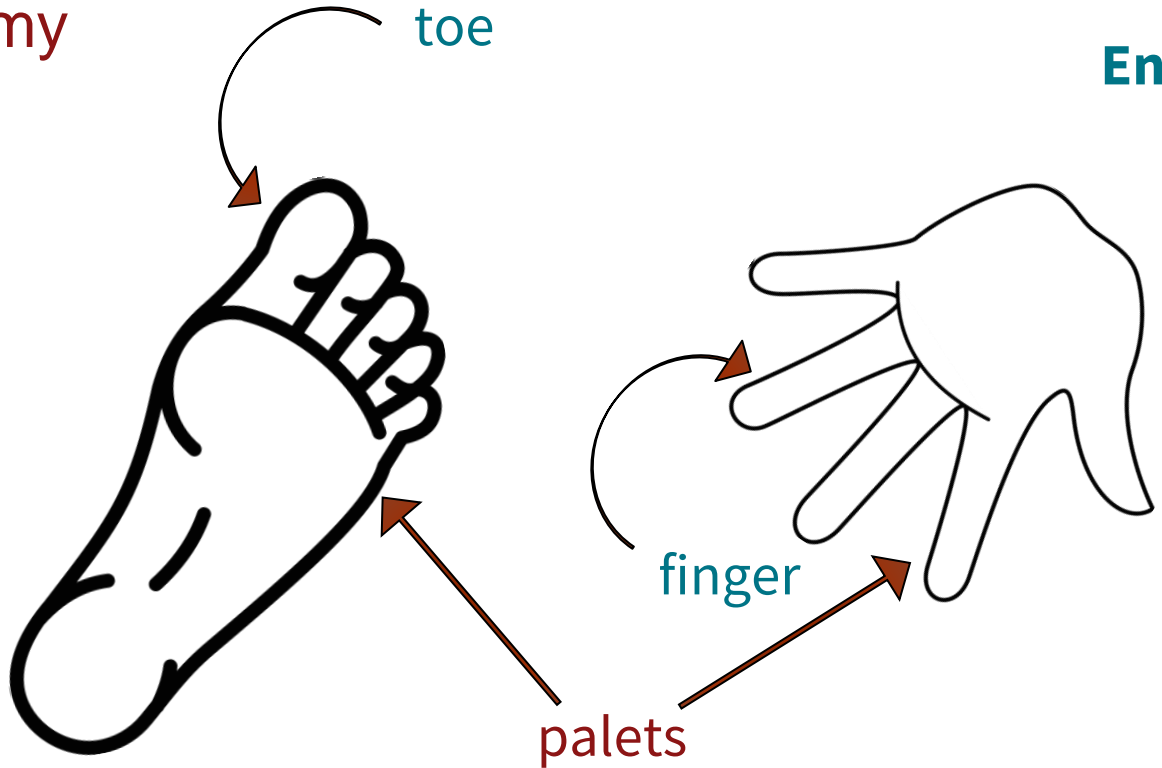
Dimensions of partitioning the world

Taxonomy (grouping / dissection)
how things are grouped into types



Taxonomy

English



Russian

Activity

Three generalizations:

1. If a language has words for individual toes, then it has words for individual fingers.
2. If a language has a word for foot, it also has a word for hand.
3. Head, trunk, arm and leg are always conceptualized as belonging to the body.

For each generalization, is this generalization about taxonomy or partonomy?

Andersen 1978. Lexical universals in body-part terminology

Dimensions of partitioning the world

Boundary location

Where to draw the boundaries between categories?



- Where does a leg end and a foot start?
- Is the wrist part of the arm or the hand, or neither?
- What part of the body is the shoulder, and does it overlap with other categories?

Questions?