

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 15
Lexical Typology: An Introduction

Hi, hello everyone. Welcome to this session of my NPTEL course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. We are going to discuss lexical and morphological typology. This is just the introduction lecture and eventually I will move to the typological approach of lexical and morphological features of language. To begin with, let me ask you a few questions. What do you mean by lexical and what do you mean by morphological? How are they different and what kind of interrelatedness do they have? Why have I put them together? These are the two questions you should think about.

When I say lexical typology, I should have covered it in a different unit; when I say morphological typology, I should cover it in a different unit. But instead of doing that, I have kept them together for a reason. That means there must be some kind of connection or some sort of interrelatedness in these two terms, that is the first thing. And the other thing is that there must be certain differences which is why I have used two distinct terms. Otherwise lexical typology might take care of morphological typology and and other way round, but that does not happen.

Considering that we need to find out how they are different and how they are similar, eventually I will move to certain fundamental questions. But first, let us try to find out what these two terms mean. When I say lexical typology, I am going to talk about certain words or certain phrases which are different or which are separate, independent units in different languages. I will give you the example of let us say kinship terms. When I say kinship terms, it is the family of relations. When you say uncle; uncle as a lexical item is different from let us say [FL] in Hindi or [FL] in Odia and uncle in English.

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Lexical and Morphological Typology



So, these are the different lexical items used in different languages. When you approach it from a typological perspective, we have to find out what are the types available in the lexicon of varieties of languages and what are the different words used for that. That is one thing, and when I say morphological typology, morphological is more abstract. Lexical is more concrete. You can actually see these are distinct units and it is easier to understand the lexical differences in a language, than morphological. Again, this is a relative statement.

But then, for sure the morphological analysis is more abstract than the lexical one. In case of morphological typology, we need to find out what are the different morphemes, what are the different parts of a single word or a compound word or a complex word and we have to analyze each part of it.

In lexical topology, we approach it as a whole, a word as a whole, that is lexical. And when we say morphological, we try to identify how minimum we can have a unit of a word; like how many parts we can divide it into so that we can examine, we can observe and we can analyze each part of a word as much as possible.

So, in that sense, both lexical typology and morphological typology would deal with words as far as the connection is concerned, interrelatedness is concerned. Both of them have one common agenda to understand the word system. But how are they different? When you

approach lexical typology, you are approaching the words as whole units. But when you are approaching morphological typology, you are looking at words with their subunits or with their subparts I would say. So, lexical item means whole; morphological item means it is part of each word, it is the part and subpart.

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Introduction



- What do languages have words for?
- What would the words be like?
- What is an ideal vocabulary?
 - i. There is a word for everything.
 - ii. From the way a word sounds, it is easy to tell what it means.

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So, with this information, let us move to the fundamental questions that lexical typology and morphological typology would raise in linguistics literature. There are three questions we have listed here. The first question is what do languages have words for? Does the question sound a little weird? Because it ends with a preposition, it might be a little unusual for a lot of traditional grammarians.

Because traditional English grammar does not appreciate the use of prepositions at the end of the sentence, but I do not know how else I could write it. And Language Psychology published by like Introducing language typology published by Cambridge university press. So, this is the question that has been listed there.

So, the first question is that why do languages need words or what do languages have words for? Why do you need a word? What is the role of it? What is the necessity of having words in any given language? So, that is the question. We accept it, there could be some reason, we do not know what is that reason, we will probe further. But given the condition that languages

do have words and words do have their own relevance, because without relevance generally we do not have anything in the world. Each tiny thing that we encounter or we meet or we experience would have certain relation or that would have certain relevance in our day-to-day life.

We assume that or we accept the fact that languages have words and having words is sufficient to claim that they have relevance in human language. So, that is done. We accept it. Then, the next question is if languages have words, and they are relevant, how would the words be like, what is the ideal situation or what is an ideal vocabulary? That is the third question. So, second and the third, they are the related ones or connected ones. So now, let us put all the three questions together which have some kind of connection between each other.

The first question what do languages have words for; why do languages need words? Second, if languages need words and then they are pretty much relevant like any other grammatical items then, what would the words be like? How do they look like? How should they be and what are the features of an ideal word? Then the third thing is that what do you mean by an ideal vocabulary?

Vocabulary is the word system. In different languages what are the features of an ideal vocabulary? How would you claim or what would you assume; what would you call ideal as far as vocabulary in any given language is concerned? So, the third question will have two features like if you ask me the third question, I would come up with two possible answers and both the answers are mentioned here.

Let us recall what is the question. If you could recall, the question is what is an ideal vocabulary; what should be the features of it and when you say a particular language has an ideal vocabulary what sort of possible combinations would it have or what sort of possible propositions it might have after this? So first, if a particular language has an ideal vocabulary or if I say the vocabulary system of a given language is ideal in that sense, it will be the first possibility or the first explanation would be that there is a word for everything.

You name any or you look at any object or you experience any instance or you feel any motion anything, it will have a word for it. One of the most primary features of an ideal vocabulary is that there is a word for everything; every tangible and intangible thing. There

should be a word for each kind of possible emotions, each kind of possible experiences, each kind of possible instances and each kind of possible objects.

Everything that you see, that you think, that you imagine and that you feel should have a name. That is the first feature of an ideal vocabulary. And what is the second feature? The second feature is the way a word sounds it should be easy to tell what it means. There should not be two words having the same meaning or one word having multiple meanings. That is also not an ideal condition for claiming some vocabulary as ideal. There should also not be any mismatch between the pronunciation and the meaning or the writing.

There should not be any kind of mismatch between the phonetic and orthographic representation. The way you write is the way you should read them. If I want to approach it the other way round, then listening to the word or reading the word if it is in the written form, the way a word sounds, you should easily get an idea what it means. The meaning of the word should be very clear from the way it sounds. So, these are the two primary features of an ideal vocabulary.

The concern here is that do you think all the languages in the world will have these two ideal conditions? What is the first condition? There is a word for everything. Second condition, from the way a word sounds, it is easy to tell what it means. If these two conditions are accepted or if they stand true; then obviously, we can say the vocabulary of that particular language is ideal.

But unfortunately, it does not work in this way for all languages and I would say for most of the languages. There are words where there is a huge mismatch between the spelling and the pronunciation. There are certain words which have multiple meanings and there are multiple things which might be denoted by just one word.

There are so many permutations and combinations that we would encounter when we gradually try to understand the lexical typology. So, these are the primary or the more fundamental questions of lexical typology and when we try to understand it in a more abstract form at the abstract level, then we are heading towards morphological typology. For the

moment, I am just going to keep them together. So, I would begin the discussion with lexical typology and eventually, we will think about the morphological ones.

So, now I am going to list a few words maybe just a couple of them and we will see how many of these words, you are familiar with, because remember I told you, when I am discussing lexical typology, I am going to approach the words as a whole unit. There is this whole and part relation. I am not going to target any part of it, unlike what I am going to do in the morphological typology.

Here my focus is on the entire unit. So, I am going to write a few new words for you. I assume that some of you might not know what it is and I will give you a minute's time, why don't you think about the possible meaning of these words.

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downpause (N) - The split-second interruption of rain as you drive your car under the bridge.
dasho (N) - The area between a car's windshield and dashboard where coins, pencils etc. can't be humanly retrieved.
Cinemuck (N) - The sticky substance on the floors of a movie theater.
blibbuck (N) - The spot on a dog's stomach, which when rubbed, causes his legs to rotate wildly.

Semantics
Body parts
Kinship terms
Personal pronouns
numeral
antonymic adjectives
color words



I will give you some information about each word and then, let us see. So, this is a noun. All of them, this is also a noun. This is a noun too. So, if you ask me what sort of parts of speech are they, I am going to say these are nouns.

So, what do you think? What is the idea that you have when you hear a word like downpause? The other word is dasho. Then I think it is cinemuck, if I am not wrong in

pronunciation and then we have blibula. So, all of these words are not much commonly found in the day-to-day discourse of a common man or of any human being for that matter.

So, these are the contexts of the situation-specific words. I was talking about how is this an ideal situation in any vocabulary so that you have words for everything. The concern here is that what do you mean by everything and what I added, I added that everything means everything that you encounter, experience, feel, touch, see through all your five senses. So, anything that you can think about, that you can imagine, should have a word. That is the most ideal situation as far as vocabulary is concerned.

But if you think a little deeper into it, you would realize that we are actually creating new words sometimes and we are deleting the old ones sometimes. The meaning of the word is getting changed. So, all these discussions will happen in the next couple of sessions when I will talk about neologism.

Before that, let me just give you an idea that its equally difficult for us to identify or to understand the meaning of everything. It is difficult to claim that my language has the ideal vocabulary or your language has the ideal vocabulary. These situations are not that easy. So, to reiterate or to go back to the question that we have words for everything; that means, we have to find out if a particular language has words for everything.

There is absolutely no need to create new words or to bring in the novelty items into the lexicon. If anything that you think about or anything that you imagine already has a word in that language, then there is no scope of novelty. But fortunately, it does not work in that way. Language is dynamic. It keeps changing. It keeps evolving, no matter how slow the pace is. That is why we do see that there is the inclusion of novelty items in the lexicon or the lexical system of any given language.

We will talk about a few examples in English. As I have already mentioned in my previous lectures that the examples are primarily going to be in English because that is a common language between you and me. The instructor and the participants, should have a common language to communicate. And then, considering we are talking about a common language

English, there is no other language which could be better than this as far as an online teaching method is concerned.

So, what I will do here? I will bring in a few English words. The first word I have written here. Look at the list given, its downpause which is a noun. What does it mean? I am sure a lot of you would hear the word for the first time and for your information downpause means the split second interruption of rain as you drive your car under the bridge. It is the tiny second or the split second interruption when rain stops as you are driving your car under a bridge. That is downpause.

Then, the second word I have listed here is dasho. Dasho is also a new word for most of us and this has a unique meaning also. It is difficult for you to use it in the day-to-day discourse. Although it is very essential but hardly do we use it. Dasho is the area between a car's windshield and the dashboard.

So, there is this dashboard and there is the windshield, the gap between these two where we tend to lose our pencils or coins and it is humanly impossible to retrieve it from there. If a coin slips into it or a tiny pencil slips into the dasho area, the area between the car's windshield and the dashboard, it is almost impossible for a human to retrieve it from there. So, that is dasho.

Then, there is the third word cinemuck. Cinemuck means the sticky substance on the floor of a movie theatre. When you go and watch a movie, hardly do you really notice the sticky substance of the floor. That is what we call cinemuck. And finally, we have blibula. Blibula means the spot on a dog's stomach which when rubbed causes his legs to rotate widely. So, that is blibula.

I would ask you to think about these words and do let me know how many of you have actually had some idea about the words and the context where it is used. Did you ever think about that split second of interruption of rain when you drive your car under the bridge? Did you ever think about it that there could be a specific word which should be there for this context or for this situation?

Did you ever think that there would be a space between the dashboard and the windshield and it would have a different name? Did you ever think the sticky substance on the floor of a movie theater should also have name, should also have an independent lexical identity or did you ever think there is a particular place or there is a particular spot on your dog's stomach, if you rub that area or if you pat that area, then the dog is going to be very happy and its legs are going to be wide open?

Did you really think about these things. Unless you actually you look around and unless you think that this particular thing should have a word, you would not really care for the words listed over here. These are called novelty items. These are the instances or these are the situations where you might need more intervention of lexical items. That means, you might need new words to fill the gap in these things.

What I want to mean here or what I want to show here is that these novelty items or these new items, what do they show? They show that not only our language does not have words for everything but also it would be difficult to define what everything means. That is a very important thing for you to remember. So, this list of 4 words that I have written here, gives us an idea that our language does not have words for everything. Also, it would be difficult for a human to define what everything means.

Before you knew about these four words, did you even know that there is a space which has a separate name between the windshield and the dashboard? No, not really. We know the windshield, we know the dashboard; but there is the middle area between these two, that also has a different name, we did not really think about it. That is why these are the two concerns that we have to take into account.

I will give you a simple example. What are the two concerns? First, our language does not have a word for everything. Second, it is difficult to define what is everything. Let us approach it from your bodily perspective. So now, look at your fingers. How many fingers do you have? We have 10 fingers. And do you think all the 10 fingers have distinct names? Yes; obviously. This is a thumb. This is the little finger. This is a ring finger and this is the middle finger and this is what? Think about it and tell me what is the name of this. And these five

fingers are going to be on the right hand and the other five fingers are going to be on the left hand.

So, you have a distinct name for each of the fingers, but do you think that is enough about your fingers? Why don't you just give it a thought? If I tell you this is my thumb. Don't you think our language should also have a word for the inside of the thumb and the outside of the thumb. You understand this is the little finger. Don't you think the inside of the little finger should have a word and the outside of the little finger should have a word? Don't you think so? Isn't it a logical question considering we are trying to explore a question like words for everything?

Obviously, this is not this side, if you can look at me in the video. So, this side, the inside of the finger is definitely different from the outside and if it is different from the outside, how can you call this is also finger, this is also finger. So that means, the inside part should have a different name, should have a different word and then the outside part also should have a different word, but we do not have that. Together we call it a little finger. So, this entire thing is little finger. We do not have a name for this. We do not have a name for this. Not even that. There are how many knuckles here? There is one knuckle, the second knuckle is here. So, don't you think we need to have a distinct word for this knuckle, a distinct word for this knuckle, so that we can identify it easily? This is funny. These sound funny, but these are relevant questions.

And when you look at the palm as a whole, don't you think each of the nails should have a different name? For sure the nail on my little finger is different from the nail on my ring finger. So, if it is different from the ring finger, don't you think there should be a different word for this? There should be a different word for this. Why am I supposed to call both of them as nails? And look, on the top of the nails, you have a small semicircle. If you grow your nails a bit, there is a semicircle.

Don't you think the fingernails and the semicircle on each nail should have a different name? Like that you can divide just the palm into so many things. So, it is practically impossible to name each and every part. The first thing that we realized through the lexical typological approach is that maybe some language I am not aware about, but there could be some

language which has such kind of names. But then at least English does not have them. At least the language that I speak, Odia, does not have them. I would say I am sure most of the Indian languages do not have them.

Why don't you think about it? Do you think your vocabulary is ideal? No. Then the clear question would be there is nothing called ideal in any vocabulary because we do not know what does it mean to have a word for everything, and second we do not know what is the meaning of everything. Considering these are the restrictions that we have, we need to figure out the relations or when we are trying to understand lexical typology, we will focus on certain relations or certain things and we will try to find out how we can accommodate them through a typological approach.

In Moravcsik, we talk about the semantic fields of 6 categories: the discussion on body parts; the discussion on kinship terms, kinship terms are the family relations; personal pronouns, numerals and antonymic objectives and color words. Let me write it over here. These are the 6 domains that Moravcsik would discuss, the semantic fields. When I talk about lexical typology, I am going to talk about the semantic relation, the semantics of body parts.

Basically if you check the book, you will find out more information about it. Then, there is kinship terms. We also have personal pronouns. Then, we have let us say numerals, antonymic adjectives and finally, color words. I might just skip a couple of them because I want you to go back to the book and find out more about it. So, these are the 6 different fields, where the semantic relation is being talked about.