

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 04
Introduction to Language Typology

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Typology: Introduction



- Functionalist-typological (Greenbergian) approach follows deductive method to study languages.
- Formal-generative (Chomskyan) approach follows inductive method to study languages.

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Hi, welcome to the session again. We stopped at the goals of the course and how typological research is going to help you to understand linguistics as a discipline better. Now, let us see what is typological study of languages. When I say this course focuses on typological approach, the very first question that comes to your mind is why typological study is important and how it is going to be significant to understand linguistics as a discipline. So, I will just begin the discussion with the small example which I cited a while ago.

I was talking about the word order, and when I say word order, my focus is on the subject, object and verb. These are the most commonly found units or most commonly found items in a given language. So, if you want to focus on typological study, then this particular thought or this particular idea has two different domains. First would be or one of the prominent domains is the functional typological approach or you can say functionalist typological approach, which is also known as the Greenbergian approach.

And why do we call it Greenbergian approach? I told you just a few minutes ago. Greenberg in 1954 had this seminal work in language universals, which gave a different direction to typological study. He being the founding researcher of such a school of thought, we call functionalist typological approach as Greenbergian approach. In his approach, he primarily follows the deductive method of language study.

He would have a lot of language samples and on the basis of the language samples he would draw some generalizations. This method is known as the deductive method. You are trying to deduce a generalization on the basis of the linguistic data or empirical data that you have in hand. That is why we primarily consider it a theory-neutral language-particular description-based approach. It sounds a little heavy, but let us break it into smaller parts.

Greenbergian approach of typology, which is also known as functionalist typology, is a theory-neutral approach. When I say theory-neutral approach, I am talking about the empirical data set and the empirical data set is the linguistic data set here. So, he is not much focused on the theory of natural language, rather he is focusing on particular languages. If you can recall I was talking about a big L and small l. So here, the focus of Greenbergian approach is on the language-particular phenomenon. When I say language-particular, it eventually becomes a theory-neutral approach.

The other side of the story is formal generative approach, this is mainly Chomskyan approach and it is diametrically opposite from Greenbergian approach. In the formal generative approach, we follow the inductive method of study. When I say inductive method of study, we start it from a generalization, then we try to test that using the linguistic samples or the data samples that we have in hand.

So, look at the huge difference that these two approaches have. On one hand we have deductive method, where there is a huge sample size; and on the basis of the data samples that you have, you are trying to draw the generalization. The other side of the story, you already have a concept in mind, you already have a theory in hand. So, this is not theory-neutral, this is theory-particular or it is basically theory-sensitive; you have a theory to begin with.

And now what you are going to do, you want to test if your theory can stand or if your theory can accommodate the varieties of data which are available in various languages of the world. So, this approach is known as formal generative approach.

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FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH



- Deals with a theory neutral language-particular description.
- Based on performance regularities and provides system-external explanation of universals (Haspelmath 2005)
- Classifies languages into different structural types.



Let us keep these two approaches in mind and then we will move to how we are going to understand each of them in much detail. I have already given you some idea about Chomskyan approach. However, considering this is a course, Appreciating Linguistics from a typological perspective, I would primarily focus on the functionalist approach of typology.

As I have just mentioned, functionalist approach of typology deals with language-particular description. We are not really talking about generalizations here, the generalizations will surely come, not immediately, but eventually. Here the study is going to be related to particular languages.

Haspelmath(2005) is a fairly recent work. He has extensively worked on this and the kind of research that he does, it is related to or it is based on the performance regularities. What is performance regularity? From the different samples of languages that Greenberg has considered, he tries to study the performance regularities of the languages. So, what does he do? He considers one linguistic phenomenon and tries to find out from the sample of languages that he has collected or the sample of languages that he is working on, whether this

particular linguistic phenomenon has a performance regularity or not or whether this is regularly available in a huge repository of languages.

If it is found regularly available in most of the languages, it is considered to be sometimes a universal and there are different types of universals; we will go to these details a little later. But as of now, just remember one of the pioneers of Greenbergian or functionalist typological research is Martin Haspelmath. He would primarily focus on the performance regularity. He also provides system-external explanation of universals.

So, the kind of language universals that functionalist researchers like Greenberg would talk about is system-external. You are not really going to talk about what is a theory underlying structure or what is the internal structure, rather, you are going to talk about how the language is used in the discourse. What kind of linguistic phenomenon you encounter when you are trying to understand the function of language in the discourse.

And to understand this, let us consider one linguistic phenomenon which I was already talking about, and we will see how we are going to segregate languages into different structural types. Do remember the root word of typology is type, so our focus is going to be on language types. Some of the languages are SOVs, some are SVO, some others are OSV and OVS. So, there are 6 different patterns.

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FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH



- Structural types studied at three different levels

- i. Qualitative Typology: categorizing languages according to certain trait

- e.g. basic word order- SVO, SOV, VOS, VSO, OSV, OVS

- ii. Quantitative Typology: surveying of languages statistically and aeriially distributes them.

- (Haspelmath, 2005)

- iii. Theoretical Typology: attempts to find an explanation for the types of languages usually in pragmatic terms.



This kind of research is generally done on three different levels and what are the three different levels here? Typological work can be studied qualitatively. When I say qualitatively, I am trying to understand just the word order of different languages without really focusing on the number. I am just trying to figure out these are possible word orders found in the world's languages, so that would be known as qualitative typology. If you look at the slides, we categorize languages according to certain trait and what is the trait here? The trait here is the word order pattern.

Then the second category or the second type of study in the same approach is quantitative typology. In quantitative typology, not only are we trying to understand certain traits but also trying to understand how many of the languages have a particular trait.

So, the first one is about quality, the second one is about quantity. How many languages in the world follow SOV pattern, how many languages follow SVO pattern and how many languages follow VSO pattern for that matter. Please refer to the seminal work of Haspelmath and Dryer(2005) on this issue, with the sample size of maybe some 2000 languages that they studied, their claim is that approximately some 497 languages in the world have SOV pattern. So, what is SOV pattern? SOV would be Subject Object and Verb, that is the Hindi type, if you look at the South-Asian languages [FL]. So, [FL] is the verb, [FL] is the subject, [FL] is the [FL] which is food is the object. I food eat. English has a different word order. So, approximately 497 languages in the world follow this pattern.

On the other hand, 436 languages that they have studied in their project, follow SVO pattern like English. I eat food. I is the subject, eat is the verb and food is the object. Then we have the other category VSO and they have listed some 85 languages that follow VSO pattern.

So, if you look at the 6 possible kinds of combinations listed here: SVO, SOV, VOS, VSO, OSV and OVS; out of these six, the first two are the most commonly found ones and the last two are the rarest ones in the world's languages. If you look at SOV, most of the Asian languages except South-East Asia and the Middle East, follow SOV pattern. Again, I am reiterating that most of the Asian languages, not all of them. Only South-East Asia and the Middle East they have a different pattern, but otherwise it is SOV.

SVO, again English, which is one of the most widely studied languages. Most of the Germanic languages follow SVO. Besides that, we also have languages spoken in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also the area that is extending from China to South-East Asia, that includes the Austronesian languages in Indonesia and Western Pacific Europe and around the Mediterranean sea, all these areas will have languages following SVO pattern.

So, look at the division now. SOV primarily Asia, SVO the rest of the world; Sub-Saharan Africa the area that includes China and South-East Asia into the Austronesian languages of Indonesia plus the Western Pacific languages, European languages, Mediterranean languages all of them they follow SVO. That gives us an idea that these two types SVO type and SOV type are the most widely found typological patterns.

Then we have VSO that is primarily spoken in Eastern Africa. If you remember the number was like 85 I think and they are the Eastern Sudanic languages. In north Africa, we have the verbal languages. In the west like in the western extreme of Europe, that is the Celtic languages, languages spoken in and around Philippines these are some Polynesian languages also some Polynesian languages of Pacific, these are the places where you will find languages that follow VSO pattern.

And the two rarest types that I mentioned OSV and OVS. OVS pattern is primarily found in the native American languages, also the other languages spoken in the Amazon basin and then OSV generally is spoken in Venezuela, Brazil and North-Eastern Australia and Indonesia, so these are the rarest forms. This is how we should understand when we say structural typology.

So, Greenbergian approach or the theory-neutral language-particular approach would focus on individual languages or would focus on particular languages. And they would try to understand or they would try to analyse the data. Either the data is collected through the recordings or through questionnaire. It depends on the researcher what is the methodology that he wants to adopt. And once the data has been collected, it is segregated and the samples are analysed and on the basis of this analysis, we are going to understand which language belongs to which type. So, this is about the qualitative and quantitative typology.

If you remember the third typology that I mentioned is theoretical typology. So, when I say theoretical typology, what does it do? In qualitative typology, typology deals with certain traits; quantitative typology deals with the numbers that these traits are sort of associated with. Finally, what does theoretical typology do? What sort of work we should hope to encounter when we are talking about the theoretical typology? Theoretical typology primarily attempts to have an explanation for the types. If I say SOV and SVO and there is a difference in the linguistic phenomena related to certain languages, theoretical typology will ask the question why; why such kind of a difference occurs and how to account for this why? So, generally this is done in a pragmatic term

Sometimes we try to understand if there is language contact, language convergence, language divergence. If two different languages are bordering each other, yet they have different word order, what could have been the possible reason of such differences? And if there are two different language families, but they follow a certain type, what could be the possible reasons? These similarities and differences would be decided on the basis of certain language contact, language change and basically some pragmatic factors, so that would be the theoretical typology.

For this particular course, our focus is going to be functional typology, but then that does not mean that I will completely stay away from formal or generative typology. I will primarily bring in language data and we are going to focus on the deductive method. We have the data, we will try to do the analysis and we will come up with generalizations. That is how the assignments are going to be designed.

So, that is all I can talk about as far as typological study is concerned for the natural language. My suggestion for you would be, be a linguist and appreciate this discipline, also try to find out how you can contribute to enrich or to nourish this fairly younger discipline compared to old disciplines like philosophy. So, if you compare it with philosophy, then it is going to be fairly a younger discipline, but then people like you and I, those who are practising linguists, we can contribute to the nourishment of such a discipline by appreciating it.

And how you are going to appreciate? You are going to appreciate it by working on it and my concern for this particular course, I want you to appreciate linguistics following a typological approach. So, let us understand more about it and then let us gear up for some data that we want to collect. First I will give you a sample data you need to analyse and after that you should collect more data. Then, that is going to be the contact point between you and I, and we have to do the analysis and we have to come up with some very basic generalizations considering this is going to be a preliminary foundation level course.

I hope this is going to help you understand linguistics as a discipline and once you understand it, you should be able to appreciate it even more.

Thank you.

Keywords: Greenbergian approach, deductive method, theory-neutral, language-particular, description-based approach, Chomskyan approach, inductive method, theory-particular, performance regularity, language universals, system-external, qualitative typology, quantitative typology, structural typology, theoretical typology