

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture – 64
Typology and Universal Continued

Hello everyone, welcome to this session of our NPTEL course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach.

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Classification of Language Universals

- I. Formal and Substantive
- II. Implicational and Non-Implicational
- III. Absolute and Tendencies



This is the extension of our discussion on language universals and linguistic typology. What we want to discuss over here is that there were certain types of universals and the formalists approach it from a different angle and the functionalist approach it from a different angle.

If we classify language universals, one category is formal, the other category is substantive; then we have implicational and non-implicational; finally, we have absolute universals and what are the tendencies. So, that is what we have got to discuss in this session.

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I. Formal and Substantive Universal



- Substantive universals are those categories, taken in a wide sense, are posited as language universals
- A substantive universal is a category that must be present in each individual human language. *gmp*
- The set of substantive universal, in a given area might represent a set from which individual languages can form a subset.

Substantive Universals
Verbs NP Sub DO IO



We had a bit of discussion on implicational and absolute universals in some other session. But let me just give you the categorical difference that these two types or these two universal types have.

First let us look at the substantive universals. Substantive universals are basically categories. And what categories? The categories which are found in almost all the languages in the world, then we call it substantive universal. We have verbs, noun phrases, subject, direct object, indirect object, these are the substantive ones and it must be present in each individual human language.

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I. Formal and Substantive Universal



- Formal universals are statements on the form of rules of grammar.
- E.g. "no language could form a question by simply inverting the word order"
 - 1(a) This is the house that Jack built.
 - * (b) built Jack that house the is this?
- This is true for a wide range of languages

• *Substantive vs Formal: The former distinguishes what is necessary from what is unnecessary, the latter distinguishes between what is possible and what is impossible.*



However, as far as the formal universals are concerned, these are not categories, rather these are statements which are based on the form of rules of grammar. So, if grammar of a particular language has certain statements then we are going to call it formal universals.

For example, no language could form a question by simply inverting the word order. Sometimes we do see in certain languages by using different kind of pragmatics tactics or the intonations we might have the question forms, but just by reversing the word order, you cannot form a question.

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• Substantive vs Formal: the first distinguishes what is necessary from what is unnecessary, the latter distinguishes between what is possible and what is impossible.



Let us say this is the house that Jack built, if that is a sentence, we cannot say that the question can be made or a question can be formed out of the statement just by reversing the word order; built Jack that house is this, that is no question. This is called your formal universal. Substantive ones focus on the categories; formal ones focus on the statements that is why we call it formal.

Formal universals generally hold true or they are available for a wide range of languages. On the other hand the substantive ones would be found across languages, but formal ones would be available or would be found in a wide range of languages.

Look at the red thing that is written here. When I say substantive versus formal; the former distinguishes what is necessary from what is unnecessary, the latter distinguishes between what is possible and what is impossible. The former distinguishes what is necessary from what is unnecessary and the latter distinguishes what is possible and what is impossible or what is not possible.

So, the substantive ones differentiate between necessary and unnecessary and the substantive and the formal ones, they distinguish between possibility and impossibility of a certain thing.

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II. Implicational and Non-Implicational



- Implicational universals are those which relate the presence of one property to the presence of some other property of a given language.
- E.g. 'If a language has VSO word order, then it has prepositions.'
- Presence of VSO = p (whence absence of VSO = not-p)
- Presence of Preposition = q (whence absence of preposition = not-q)
- The universal – if p, then q
- Truth value:
 - (a) p and q
 - (b) p and not-q
 - (c) not-p and q
 - (d) not-p and not-q

Redundant
If there is 'x', there will be 'y'
1st & 2nd parts → 3rd part not.



Now with this information, I would like you to have a look at the next category of universals that is implicational and non-implicational. In case of implicational universals, these are the ones which relate the presence of one property to the presence of some other property of a given language. If there is X they would be Y, if there is no X there would be no Y. It is always condition based.

This condition based universals are known as implicational ones. Let us look at the example here. If a language has a VSO word order; V is Verb, S is Subject, O is Object. A language with VSO word order if such is the case then it must have prepositions. VSO means the language will have preposition.

That means, when it is VSO, P that is the preposition, I am writing P here and I am writing Q here. So, if the language is VSO, there is a particular point called P, and this P is going to be preposition and if there is an absence of preposition; that means, there is no Q over here.

Now, let us try to figure out how to identify an implicational universal which is based on a lot of conditional sentences. The conditional sentences means if there is X then there would be Y. So that means, the presence of Y is primarily an implication of X; if there is no X, there cannot be any Y.

So, in this connection I would like to tell you if a language has first person and second person reflexive, it must have third person reflexive. First and second person reflexive would lead to third person reflexive. That means, maybe there are certain languages which have first and second person reflexive, but they do not have the third person, but the other way around is absolutely impossible. That means, there would not be any language which has third person reflexive, but not first and second, that does not work.

First and second person reflexives are the implications of the third person reflexive. Similar is the case with prepositions. So, if a language has VSO then, it will have a preposition, it will never have a postposition. So, what is the truth value? If there is P then there is Q. Let us say P is VSO, Q is the preposition.

So, if the language is VSO, there is a preposition. If the language has VSO; that means, if the language is P, it will have Q. There could be a language which has P, but no Q it is VSO, but it does not have preposition, that is also still, but not P that the language is not VSO and the language has preposition, that is going to be a confusing and no P no Q is also going to be ok. My suggestion would be do not look for this example, this is a little clumsy. So, in this connection you look at the reflexive example.

In case of reflexives if a language has the feature P; let us say feature P indicates first and second person reflexive and feature Q is the third person reflexive. So; that means, if a language has a feature P, if the language has first person and second person reflexive, it will definitely have the third person reflexive. So, there is P there is Q, one truth value; P no Q second truth value, no P and Q, third truth value and no P no Q, fourth truth value; out of this the third one is going to be unacceptable, no P but there is Q that is absolutely unacceptable.

And no P no Q is let us say there is no first person second person reflexive. So, you may not have the third person reflexive, that is perfectly fine. But you do not have first person and second person, and you have the third person, that is unacceptable. So, that is how we understand implicational implicational universals.

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II. Implicational and Non-Implicational



- Non-Implicational universals are those which can state whether certain properties are found in natural language, without reference to any other property of the given language.
- E.g. 'all languages have oral vowels'



Now, let us look at the non-implicational. Non-implicational universals do not include any if-whether kind of a conditional sentence. Non-implicational X are those which can state whether certain properties are found in natural language without reference to any other property of the given language.

These are independent of any other property. I just talked about reflexives in the first, second and third person. The reflexives in the first and the second person would imply the third person, but in case of non-implicational, no such condition is applied or no such condition is required. The linguistic phenomenon that has been discussed here is going to be considered independent of any other linguistic phenomenon in the same language.

Let us say all languages have oral vowels, that does not mean that it has any connection with the consonants. Consonants may or may not be there, that is none of our business; but for sure the non-implicational universal is that all natural languages or the human languages have oral vowels. That is available across languages. So, that is called non-implicational, it does not have any connection with any other kinds of conditional sentences.

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III. Absolute Universals & Tendencies



- Universal Tendencies: a strategically significant deviation from random patterning
- Absolute Universal: the extreme deviation from random distribution
- E.g. 'the subject precedes the object'
 - A number of languages violate this
 - However a large number conform to it



Now, let us move to the absolute universals and their tendencies. What are the absolute universals? The absolute universals primarily have universal tendencies and this is strategically significant deviation from the random patterning. That means, there are certain things which are exclusively available in the domain of natural languages.

An example of an absolute universal would be that is an extreme deviation from the random distribution. There is no randomness associated with absolute universals; that means, there is a strict pattern that human languages follow. For example, the subject precedes the object. So, the subject precedes the object would be considered as an absolute universal if and only if there is no violation. But, the reality is that a lot of languages violate this. On the other hand a large number of languages also agree with this.

So, that is why when you say the subject precedes the object, I am not sure if you can really consider it as an absolute universal. So, when you look at something significant or when you look at something absolute; that means, one parameter that you need to focus on is that there is a distinguishing absolute universal in most of the world's languages; that means, it is exceptionless those that exist as tendencies, but do still have exceptions.

Generally they are considered to be exceptionless, but because of the tendencies which are associated with it, you might have certain kind of exceptions based on that. So, that would be

known as absolute universals and SOV, SVO word order patterns are also a part of this. Sometimes the subject precedes, the object, sometimes the other way round also happens. So, certain languages which confront it, certain languages which violate it, but at the same time certain languages also support this.

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Typology and Universals



- The study of language universals and typology seem to be opposite
- Language universals research – finding those properties that are common to all human languages
- Typologists- focuses on types, differences and varieties among languages
- In practise the two are parallels
- They are 'different facets of a single research endeavour'



This kind of a universal is going to be tricky to understand in the typological literature. But, without giving much importance or without giving much focus on the divisions for the moment which eventually we will take it up later implicational versus non-implicational or absolute versus implicational in that sense.

Let us see whether we can discuss typology and language universals together, is it possible by anyway. On the surface, if you look at the objective of these domains or the objective of these disciplines you will realize that language universals would focus on the similarities primarily or a commonality that is available across languages or most of the languages then only we are going to call it universal.

So, universal means something that is common to all or at least common to most of the languages. On the other hand typology one of the major scope of typology is to highlight the differences so that we can keep different languages in the different types. So, on the surface it looks different, but actually it is not.

Let us look at a few points that have listed here, they seem to be opposite, but they are not. Why, and what happens in the language universal research? They find properties that are common to all human languages, but in typologist literature you would find out differences and varieties. However, in practice these are actually two parallels instead of calling them opposites, we should call them parallels with a common goal. And what is their common goal? The identification of commonality as well as differences.

These are the different phases of a single research endeavour. Think about the work of the typologists, what do they do? They put languages in different types. And how do they put it in different types? On the basis of the differences that they have and similarities that they have. If you say Hindi and Odia belong to one type; that means, they have certain similarities; and when you say Hindi and Odia are typologically different from Chinese, that is also typological research. That means, you are trying to identify what are the differences.

Typologists not only focus on differences, but also the commonalities or the similarities. Similar is the case with universals. When you say language universals or implicational universals, you are looking for a particular type of language which follows a common pattern and they belong to one type and that would be considered as a type of universal. Using the same kind of universals you can also segregate some other group of languages.

If you try to understand typology and universal literature that is going to be they are parallel to each other. Let us not put it in different or let us not put it in diametrically opposite directions, but rather they are moving in a parallel direction with a common goal in hand.

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Typology and Universals interface

Explores:

- Properties that are necessary to a human language
- Properties that are impossible
- Residually - which properties are contingently possible but not necessary
- Both are concerned with variations across languages
 - Language universals research –concerned with limits on this variation
 - Typological research – concerned directly with the possible variations
- *Typological research -needs parametric division of types - validation of these parameters - validation is gained from the basic assumptions of universals.*
- *Thus the two are intertwined*



So, what does typology literature explore? Typology literature explores properties that are necessary to a human language because the entire discussion in linguistics revolves around human language or natural language or you can say big L. It also gives us an idea what are the possible properties or what can be considered as a possible language or what are the possible properties that human languages may have, which are the properties which they would never have? So, the possibility and impossibility is also a part of the scope or is a part of the typological research.

So is the case with the residuality like eventually typologists also explore which properties are contingently possible, but not necessary. So, let us say there is a particular feature or there is a particular property which might be available in certain languages, but it is not necessary. And, when you compare language universal and language typology together, both the disciplines have their own limitations, and at the same time we can say that the common goal that they have is to identify the variations in language.

The variation studies will have two different approaches; you can either approach it from a typological angle or you can approach it from a universal angle, but eventually it is the same thing or the research objective is same and it boils down to the variations. Let us look at the third main point which has been listed here. Typological research needs parametric division of types and because of the parametric division, let us say word order parameter certain

languages SVO, certain languages SOV. These parametric differences get validated through various parameters and this validation comes from the universal; typology variation universal. So, it is something like that; they are interrelated. Let us say this is typology. Then here you have universal and here you have variation.

So, these three things are related to each other. It is not unidirectional. A variationist also studies typology and universals. A researcher on language universals also has to study typological features and the variation features. And the typologists will also try to understand how variation works and how the universal features of a particular language work.

So, that is why all these three domains are intertwined, to be more particular typology and language universal study, and language typology study are definitely intertwined and you cannot keep them in diametrically opposite manner, rather you have to put it in such a way that they have to gain insights from each other. They have to deploy tools which are going to be common up to some extent with each other.

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Questions to think about

- *Whether it is justifiable to have something as a universal but none the less has exceptions?*
- Most other sciences- don't have arbitrary exceptions to rules



So, now the question that you need to ask yourself is do you think it is justifiable to have something as a universal, but nonetheless has exceptions? So that means, there are certain universal features in the languages of the world, but at the same time you may or may not

consider it as a universal, that is up to you. So, language universal also considers a lot of empirical data and a typologist also considers a lot of empirical data.

So, depending on the nature of the work, it is formal typology or functional typology. If it is functional typology, more is the barrier. Bigger sample size leads to more or clearer generalizations. In case of formal typology though the restriction there is the number of samples that is restricted, rather the formalists focus a lot on the abstract principles of language.

So, a functional typologist would look at a huge variety of languages then we will have the inferences and the generalizations would be drawn. In case of formal typology with a limited set of languages, but more in depth study is required. So, because of the abstract principles that the formalists deal with, they have to do the theoretical understanding or the theoretical underpinnings if I can talk about.

So, that would be their focus; the formalists are going to focus more on in depth studies and the functionalists are going to consider a bigger sample to understand the linguistic phenomena better. Be it formal or functional, be it typological study or universal base study, we are not going to put it in absolutely opposite things, rather they are the parallel disciplines, and in either of the ways the objective remains same the goal remains same.

So, in the next sessions of my discussion I am going to focus on more specific terms related to typologies related to typological claims will have the cross link. We have already had a couple of examples of the crosslinguistic generalizations and this will help us to identify or to understand or to appreciate considering the title of the courses appreciating linguistics. So, it is going to help us to appreciate the discipline in a better way.

The right kind of understanding is required and since we are focusing on the typological approach of language we have to take up both issues together. The issues related to language typology as well as the issues related to language universals and it should help us to identify potential research questions, and it should also help us to understand the discipline in a broader sense in a more inclusive sense.

So, that ends the session for the day.

Keywords: Substantive universal, formal universal, implicational universal, non-implicational universal, absolute universal, conditional