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# Introducing Language Typology

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Note: Every chapter begins with an outline and a list of key terms and ends with a summary, activities, and a list of further reading.

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#### **Preface**

The goal of this book is to offer a few glimpses into the vast research area of linguistic typology – the study of the similarities and differences among languages that hold across genetic, areal, and cultural boundaries. It is meant for students and a general audience with some prior exposure to linguistics, such as an introductory course, but not necessarily anything more. No knowledge of foreign languages is presupposed. The glossary in the back of the book explains terms specific to language-typological research and provides references that define general grammatical terms.

Here are four features of the presentation. First, the survey of language-typological research is intended to be broad in topical coverage. Beyond the basic components of grammar – phonology, morphology, and syntax – it also offers a chapter on lexical semantics and brief sections on writing systems and sign languages. In addition to synchronic data, crosslinguistic generalizations about historical development, language acquisition, and language use are also discussed.

Second, the approach is broad in another way as well. Instead of adopting a particular descriptive framework, data are presented in a pretheoretical metalanguage that hugs the facts as much as possible. This feature should render the text relatively accessible to non-linguist readers.

Third, the pre-theoretical approach is also apparent in the selection of the crosslinguistic generalizations discussed. Hypotheses about language universals may be supported in three ways: by a set of crosslinguistic data, by a theory that predicts them, or by a combination of both. This book focuses on data-based, primarily inductive generalizations.

Fourth, a comprehensive survey of the literature on language typology is not attempted. The focus is mostly on analysis and documentation;

the goal is to introduce the reader to the kind of argumentation used in crosslinguistic research and to show its close relationship to the modes of thinking employed in other sciences and in everyday life.

Here is a brief synopsis of the book.

Chapter 1 What is language typology illustrates differences and similarities among languages and presents the statement types that serve as tools to capture their similarities.

Chapter 2 The worlds of words is about similarities and differences in the meanings of words across languages, with a few comments on what this might mean for the way people actually see the world.

Chapter 3 Assembling words, Chapter 4 Dissembling words, and Chapter 5 The sounds of languages present crosslinguistic generalizations about syntax, morphology, and phonology, with a few remarks on writing systems and sign languages.

Chapter 6 Language in flux turns to the genesis of synchronic structure by presenting crosslinguistic generalizations about historical evolution, language acquisition, and language use.

Chapter 7 Explaining crosslinguistic preferences attempts historical, acquisitional, and usage-based explanations of synchronic crosslinguistic generalizations.

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## **Abbreviations**

Most of the abbreviations used here are taken from the Leipzig Glossing Rules (www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/files/morpheme.html).

A the agent noun phrase of a two-argument verb

ABS absolutive case

ACC accusative case

ASP aspect
CAUS causative
CL class
CLF classifier
CMP comparative
DAT dative case

DC declarative clause marker

ERG ergative case
FEM feminine
GEN genitive case
GER gerund
IMPF imperfective
INDOBJ indirect object
INF infinitive

L1 first language (a language already acquired)
L2 target language (a language to be acquired)

MRK marker

MSC masculine gender
NEU neuter gender
NMLZ nominalizer
NOM nominative case

OBJ object OM object marker

ORD ordinal

OKD Ordinal

P the patient noun phrase of a two-argument verb

PART partitive case
PFV perfective
PL plural

POSS possessive marker

PREF prefix
PRF perfect
PRIV privative
PRT particle



**Abbreviations** 

xiii

PST	past tense
S	the single noun phrase of a one-argument verb
SBJ	subject
SING	singular
SUP	superlative
1S	first person singular
2S	second person singular
3S	third person singular
1P	first person plural
2P	second person plural
3P	third person plural
A & B	A immediately precedes B
-	boundary between stem and affix
=	boundary between word and clitic
#	boundary between words
[…]	phonetic transcription
<i>  </i>	phonemic transcription
,	stress
. ,	idiomatic translation

literal translation