Introducing Language Typology

Language typology identifies similarities and differences among languages of the world. This textbook provides an introduction to the subject which assumes minimal prior knowledge of linguistics. It offers the broadest coverage of any introductory book, including sections on historical change, language acquisition, and language processing. Students will become familiar with the subject by working through numerous examples of crosslinguistic generalizations and diversity in syntax, morphology, and phonology, as well as vocabulary, writing systems, and signed languages. Chapter outlines and summaries, key words, a glossary, and copious literature references help the reader understand and internalize what they have read, while activities at the end of each chapter reinforce key points.

Edith A. Moravcsik is Professor Emerita in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
**Cambridge Introductions to Language and Linguistics**

This new textbook series provides students and their teachers with accessible introductions to the major subjects encountered within the study of language and linguistics. Assuming no prior knowledge of the subject, each book is written and designed for ease of use in the classroom or seminar, and is ideal for adoption on a modular course as the core recommended textbook. Each book offers the ideal introductory material for each subject, presenting students with an overview of the main topics encountered in their course, and features a glossary of useful terms, chapter previews and summaries, suggestions for further reading, and helpful exercises. Each book is accompanied by a supporting website.

Books published in the series
- Introducing Phonology David Odden
- Introducing Speech and Language Processing John Coleman
- Introducing Phonetic Science Michael Ashby and John Maidment
- Introducing Second Language Acquisition Muriel Saville-Troike
- Introducing English Linguistics Charles F. Meyer
- Introducing Morphology Rochelle Lieber
- Introducing Semantics Nick Riemer
- Introducing Language Typology Edith A. Moravcsik

Forthcoming:
- Introducing Historical Linguistics Brian Joseph
Introducing Language Typology

EDITH A. MORAVCSIK
Professor Emerita of Linguistics
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
## Contents

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of figures</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of copyright permissions</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1. What is language typology?

1.1 Goals 2
1.2 Tools 10
   1.2.1 Statement types 10
   1.2.2 Language samples 17
   1.2.3 Data sources 19

### 2. The worlds of words: Lexical typology

2.1 Introduction 25
2.2 Me. Words for body parts 31
2.3 Me and others 34
   2.3.1 Kinship terms 34
   2.3.2 Personal pronouns 39
2.4 How many? Words for numbers 45
2.5 What kind?
   2.5.1 Antonymic adjectives 51
   2.5.2 Words for colors 56

### 3. Assembling words: Syntactic typology

3.1 Introduction 65
3.2 The choice of words and word forms 69
   3.2.1 Which words? 69
   3.2.2 Which word forms? 80
3.3 The order of words 90
3.4 Syntactic categories 101

### 4. Dissembling words: Morphological typology

4.1 Introduction 109
4.2 The choice of morphemes and morpheme forms 120
   4.2.1 Which morphemes? 120
   4.2.2 Which forms of morphemes? 126
4.3 The order of morphemes 137
4.4 Morphological categories 143
### 5. The sounds of languages: Phonological typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 The choice of sounds and sound forms</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 Which sounds?</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Which forms of sounds?</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 The order of sounds</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Phonological categories</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Visual forms of language</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 Writing systems</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 Sign languages</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6. Language in flux: Typologies of language change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 As the centuries pass … historical change</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1 The genesis of articles</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2 Word order change</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 As the weeks pass … developmental change</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1 From the mouth of babes. First-language acquisition</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2 Two systems in one head. Second-language acquisition</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 From knowing to doing. Linguistic performance</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.1 Relative clauses</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.2 Competing motivations</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7. Explaining crosslinguistic preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1 What are explanations?</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.2 Explaining language structure</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Synchrony is explained by diachrony</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Diachrony is explained by acquisition and use</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Acquisition and use are explained by function</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Postscript: 272

List of languages mentioned: 277
Glossary: 281
References: 283
Subject index: 295
Language index: 303
Author index: 307
Figures

Figure 1.1  The distribution of terms for ‘leg’ and ‘arm’.  20
Figure 2.1  Counting in Oksapmin.  48
Figure 5.1  The man and the cow are walking near the water under the starry sky.  177
Figure 5.2  Road signs.  177
Figure 5.3  Chinese pictograms and logograms.  178
Figure 5.4  Egyptian hieroglyphs.  179
Figure 5.5  Egyptian hieroglyphs with pronunciation and meaning.  180
Figure 5.6  The sign for ‘father’ in American Sign Language.  184
Figure 5.7  The signs for ‘paws’ and ‘claws’ in American Sign Language.  185
Figure 6.1  Changes in word order.  204
Figure 6.2  The semantic classification of four actions in English and in Korean.  216
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 pre-theoretical 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.

I am very grateful to my relatives, friends, and former students who have helped me with language data and comments. They are the following: Gustav Bayerle, Telle Bayerle, Yea-Fen Chen, Roberta Corrigan, Dina Crockett, Garry Davis, Fred Eckman, Nicholas Fleischer, Younghyon Heo, Gregory Iverson, John Kellogg, Ahrong Lee, Sooyeon Lee, Silvia Luraghi, Veronica Lundbäck, Julia Moravcsik, Corrine Occhino, Olesya Ostapenko, Hamid Ouali, Suyeon Seo, James Shy, Hyowon Song, Jae Jung Song, Jennifer Watson, Kathleen Wheatley, and Jessica Wirth.
My thanks go also to my linguist colleagues at the University of Budapest, the Linguistic Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the University of Vienna, the University of Hawaii, the EUROTyp project, the WALS project, the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, from whom I have learnt so much. I am also much indebted to Andrew Winnard of Cambridge University Press for his patience and encouragement, to Sarah Green, Ed Robinson, and Helena Dowson for their helpful guidance throughout the production process, to Jon Billam for his thorough copy-editing of the text and for many insightful suggestions, and to Sue Lightfoot for her careful work on the indexes.

I would not have been able to write this book without the guidance I was fortunate to receive in my early years as a linguist from Gerald A. Sanders, who was my professor at Indiana University, and from the late Joseph H. Greenberg, my project director at the Stanford Universals Project. I am profoundly grateful to both of them.
The following excerpts are reproduced by permission from the publishers.


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
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>the single noun phrase of a one-argument verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBJ</td>
<td>subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SING</td>
<td>singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUP</td>
<td>superlative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1S</td>
<td>first person singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2S</td>
<td>second person singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3S</td>
<td>third person singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1P</td>
<td>first person plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2P</td>
<td>second person plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3P</td>
<td>third person plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A &amp; B</td>
<td>A immediately precedes B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>boundary between stem and affix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>boundary between word and clitic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>boundary between words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>phonetic transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>phonemic transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>´</td>
<td>stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>`</td>
<td>idiomatic translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>literal translation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>