


Languages of the World

An Introduction

What do all human languages have in common and in what ways are they different? How can language be used to trace different peoples and their past? Assuming no prior knowledge of linguistics, the new edition of this engaging textbook introduces readers to the rich diversity of human languages, familiarizing students with the variety and typology of languages around the world. Linguistic terms and concepts are explained, in the text and in the glossary, and illustrated with simple, accessible examples. Numerous language family charts enable students to place a language genealogically. Updated and revised throughout, the second edition includes two new chapters and new pedagogical features, such as “Advanced” sections, textboxes and “Did you know?” boxes. Important websites are integrated into the text, and each chapter includes a “Do it yourself” section, comprising assignments, questions and problem sets. Supplementary online resources include illustrations, key-term flashcards and useful links. This introduction is an essential resource for undergraduate courses on language typology, historical linguistics and general linguistics.

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An Introduction

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi - 110002, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107171145

DOI: 10.1017/9781316758854

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First published 2017

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-107-17114-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-316-62196-7 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at www.cambridge.org/Pereltsvaig

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To my parents, Freyda and Michael Pereltsvayg, לְרֵי

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Preface to the Second Edition

In today's global world, it is safe to assume that you have encountered a few languages besides your mother tongue, perhaps through school, travel or work. Maybe you grew up in a bilingual environment, where your “mother tongue” co-existed side by side with a “father tongue”, or a “grandparents’ tongue”, or perhaps an “aunt Maria” or “uncle Shigeru” tongue. If so, you have undoubtedly made the same inescapable observation that struck a chord with the Ancient Greeks, and many generations since then: languages are not merely different from one another, but vastly different.

Languages use different sounds to make up different words, and combine words into phrases and sentences in very different ways. For example, Russian – which happens to be my mother tongue – uses the same word for ‘house’ and ‘home’, yet distinguishes between two different colors corresponding to the English ‘blue’ (Russian: *sinij* and *goluboj*). (All Russian examples throughout the text are rendered in the standard transliteration rather than phonetic transcription.) Russian has soft (palatalized) CONSONANTS but lacks the English “th-sounds” (θ and ð, in a linguistic notation). (Words in SMALL CAPS are explained in the Glossary.) English distinguishes *a blue house* from *the blue house*, while Russian has no counterpart to the English articles *a* or *the*. Unlike English, Russian stacks all question words at the beginning of a sentence, as in *Kto chto gde kogda kupil?*, literally ‘Who what where when bought?’ The list goes on, and each language presents its own peculiar twists.

This book combines geolinguistics (what languages are spoken where and by whom) with typology (in what ways languages differ and in what ways they are similar). It is organized geographically: as you travel through the world's regions, you will learn not only what languages you might encounter there (this information is easily obtainable online) but how these languages are related to one another, what peculiarities they share and what unique features they exhibit. You will also gain an appreciation of what is “exotic” in languages, not from the perspective of English alone, but from a more global point of view. You may even appreciate how exotic English itself is, when compared with other languages of the world.

While intended primarily as an undergraduate textbook, and complete with the pedagogical features described below, this book can serve as an introduction to the world of language and the world's languages for the general reader as well. No knowledge of linguistics or of any particular language (besides English, of course!) is presupposed, and all technical terminology is explained in the text and

in the glossary at the end of the book. Numerous examples are included throughout the book to illustrate the linguistic phenomena being discussed, as are the URLs of websites where you can hear the sounds of various languages, explore their grammatical properties or investigate their geographical distribution.

Whether or not you are using this book for a college class, I highly recommend that you roll up your sleeves and work through the “Do It Yourself” sections at the end of each chapter. Linguistics is a little like ballet: you cannot really learn it properly without doing it yourself. All the assignments included in this book are designed to be approachable – and solvable! – with just the information provided here or on the websites that are incorporated into specific assignments.

Each chapter also includes a number of features whose goal is to add interesting information, ease the reading or keep you, the reader, on your toes. Each chapter opens with a short narrative introduction and includes one or more longer “textboxes” that cover tangential topics, like indigenous African writing systems and taboo languages, and several shorter “Did You Know ?” boxes. Some sections are partitioned off from the rest of the text as “Advanced”; these segments, concerned with slightly more complicated phenomena, are meant to still be readable without any prerequisite knowledge, but you will not hurt my feelings if you decide to skip them.

Happy exploring!

Acknowledgements

We all stand on the shoulders of giants, and this book is no exception. It is my pleasure to express my gratitude to all those whose work has helped make this book a reality.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my linguistics teachers who taught me the wonders of linguistic diversity: Mark Baker, Lisa Travis and especially the late Yehuda Falk – many examples from a variety of languages used throughout this book are drawn from Yehuda’s extensive handouts and my notes from his lectures and seminars. My thanks also go to: Ekaterina Lyutikova, who has patiently checked the data from – and has generally advised me on – Turkic and Caucasian languages; George Starostin, for supplying numerous references about Nilo-Saharan languages; and Edward Vaida, for consulting me on the Dene-Yeniseian hypothesis.

I am very grateful to my colleagues who read parts of the manuscript, asked challenging questions, caught factual and stylistic errors, mentioned tidbits of interesting information about various languages and provided references to useful sources which I would not have found otherwise, and whose work on a particular language or languages has been both inspirational and helpful to me (in alphabetical order): Kirill Babaev, Michael Campbell, Stephane Goyette, Joel Hoffman, Yaron Matras, John McWhorter, Irit Meir, Johanna Nichols, Carmel O’Shannessy, Wendy Sandler and Sergei Tatevosov.

I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press, who provided numerous suggestions for significant improvements on the first edition; to the Press staff, especially Helen Barton and Rosemary Crawley, who have worked with me on making the book an effective tool for exploration and learning; and to the students in the various instantiations of my “Languages of the World” course (at Stanford’s Linguistics Department, Stanford Continuing Studies Program, Santa Clara University OLLI, San Francisco State University OLLI, the Forum at Rancho San Antonio, and the Nueva High School), who have served as the “guinea pigs” for most of the material in this book.

Last but not least, I am most thankful to Martin Lewis, who has taught me everything I know about geography and whose support throughout this project has been indispensable.

Abbreviations Used in the Glosses

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	agent-like argument of a canonical transitive verb
ABL	ablative
ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative
ADESS	adessive
ADV	adverbial clause marker (complementizer)
ALL	allative case
ANTIP	antipassive
AOR	aorist
APPL	applicative
ART	article
ASP	aspect
AT	Actor-topic
AUX	auxiliary
BT	Beneficiary-topic
CAUS	causative
CLF	classifier
CMPL	completive
COMP	complementizer
COND	conditional
CONT	continuative
CT	Circumstantial-topic
DAT	dative
DCL	declarative
DEF	definite
DET	determiner
DIRECT	direct case
DT	Direction-topic
DU	dual
DUR	durative
ERG	ergative
EVID	evidential

F	feminine
FACT	factitive
FOC	focus
FORM	formal
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
HAB	habitual
HON	honorific
INDIC	indicative mood
INDIRECT	indirect case
INS	instrumental
INTNS	intensifier
IPFV	imperfective
IT	Instrument-topic
LOC	locative
M	masculine
NEG	negation
NFUT	non-future
NMLZ	nominalizer/nominalization
NOM	nominative
OBJ	object
OBL	oblique
P	patient-like argument of a canonical transitive verb
PART	particle
PASS	passive
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
POTENT	potential
PROG	progressive
PRS	present
PRTV	partitive
PST	past
PUNC	punctual
Q	question particle/marker
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative
REPET	repetitive
SBJ	subject
SBJNCT	subjunctive

xx Abbreviations Used in the Glosses

SG	singular
SGL	singulative
TMA	tense-mood-aspect
TOP	topic
TR	transitive
TT	Theme-topic