LING 328 : Morphosyntactic Typology

TTh 10:30–11:50, VOLLUM 126

Course Syllabus
Fall 2007

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CONTENT AND FOCUS OF THE COURSE

This course deals with the study of cross-linguistic variation. Even a cursory inspection shows that languages differ from one another phonologically, and of course in their vocabulary. However, languages also exhibit variation in other domains, including:

• **Lexical and functional categories** – for example, the number and kind of ‘parts of speech’ which a language has, and the types of grammatical categories which are encoded in the morphology (tense, aspect, gender, number, definiteness, etc.).

• **Morphology** – for example, the ratio of bound morphemes to free morphemes in a language, the segmentability of words into morphemes, and the word-formation strategies which a language makes use of (affixation, compounding, reduplication, stem change, etc.).

• **Syntax** – for example, the ‘basic’ word order of sentences (if any), the configurationality of a language (i.e., the extent to which deviations from the basic word order are allowed), and the strategies which a language uses for expressing predicate-argument structure (or ‘who’s doing what to whom’) in terms of grammatical relations.

It is these categorial, morphological, and syntactic differences which we will focus on in this course.

One of the most important discoveries of modern linguistics is that morphosyntactic variation is both highly constrained and highly principled. By constrained I mean that only a small subset of the logically possible grammars are actually attested. In other words, there are non-obvious limitations on the kinds of structures that languages can have. By principled I mean that languages do not vary in structure in random ways, but according to identifiable patterns. We can express these patterns as *language universals*, probabilistic implicational statements of the form “If a language has feature X, it will (almost always) have feature Y”. Languages can thus be classified into *types* on the basis of shared combinations of features. Such a classification is called a *typology*, and the study of typologies and their implications for theories of grammar is called *Linguistic Typology*. There are two broad questions which typologists seek to answer:

• Which structural properties can vary across languages, and which cannot?
• How do we explain patterns of variation, and what do these patterns tell us about the organization of mental grammar?

We will be addressing both of these questions. The course will thus include both a *descriptive* component (a discussion of what kinds of phenomena are out there) and a *theoretical* component (a review of some classic and recent attempts to articulate and explain language universals and variation).
COURSE REQUIREMENTS, GRADING, POLICIES

Expectations

Students will be expected to attend class and participate in discussion, prepare an in-class presentation, and complete all reading assignments and written work. The written work for the course consists of six problem sets, along with a take-home final exam (the latter is essentially a longer and more comprehensive problem set which you have to complete on your own). The take-home final will be handed out during the reading period and due one week later. Details TBA.

Approximate grading basis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem sets</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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Problem sets

You will notice that the written work counts for over half of the course grade (each problem set is worth roughly 10% of the grade). In evaluating these assignments, I will look for answers that are thorough, well-reasoned, and presented with clarity, creativity, brevity, and precision. I’m less interested in how close you manage to get to the intended solution (in many cases I will be giving you data for which there is no definitive analysis anyway). As always in my classes, you are encouraged—nay, expected—to work on problem sets together, so long as you write up your answers in your own words. You should also feel free to come see me outside of class (individually, or better yet in groups) for additional help with the homework. I am always willing to talk about any aspect of the course, and to give you whatever help you may need, so please exploit my services as best you can.

Problem sets are handed out and due approximately every two weeks. The actual dates for each problem set are given in the table below. These dates are subject to modification. I will notify you of any changes as we go along.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Set</th>
<th>Handed out</th>
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<tr>
<td>PS 1</td>
<td>Thurs, Aug 30</td>
<td>Thurs, Sept 13</td>
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<td>PS 2</td>
<td>Thurs, Sept 13</td>
<td>Thurs, Sept 27</td>
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<td>PS 3</td>
<td>Thurs, Sept 27</td>
<td>Thurs, Oct 11</td>
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<td>PS 4</td>
<td>Thurs, Oct 11</td>
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<td>PS 5</td>
<td>Thurs, Nov 1</td>
<td>Thurs, Nov 15</td>
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<td>PS 6</td>
<td>Thurs, Nov 15</td>
<td>Tues, Dec 4</td>
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Problem sets must be received by 5:00 PM on the day they are due. Assignments may be submitted in hardcopy or electronic format. Hardcopy versions may be submitted in class, or to my office (please do not place them in the box outside my office, but slide them under my door if I’m not there). Electronic versions may be sent as email attachments. I strongly prefer PDF files, but will accept Word files as well.

Problem sets must be turned in on time if you wish to receive full credit and comments. Late assignments will be penalized 10% of total possible points for each day they are late. A late assignment will not be accepted for credit if it is turned in after the problem set is returned to students, or after it is discussed in class, whichever comes first. Also, late assignments will probably receive minimal comments, and may not be returned to you in a timely fashion.

In-class presentations

Given the breadth of the field, there are a number of areas which we won’t be able to cover as part of the regular syllabus. To help make up for this, you will be asked to give a presentation to the class on one of the topics listed below. You will need to prepare a detailed handout for your presentation, including
definitions and discussion of terms and concepts, and illustrative examples (glossed and explained) from various languages.

- Definiteness (and related notions: specificity, referentiality, etc.)
- Deixis
- Evidentials
- Expressing ‘peripheral’ roles (oblique cases, adpositions, serial verb constructions, etc.)
- Mood and modality
- Negation
- Nominalization
- Noun class/gender systems
- Pronoun systems and pronominal/agreement categories (person, number, gender)
- Quantification and/or number marking (singular, dual, plural, etc.)
- Relative clauses
- Switch-reference and clause chaining
- Tense and aspect
- Wh-questions, focus and clefting, and/or related constructions
- (topic of your choice, subject to my approval)

You have the option of giving an individual presentation, or collaborating with another student on a two-person presentation. Individual presentations should last about 20 minutes, while two-person presentations should last about 40 minutes (this is less time than you think). Given the number of students in the class, I would encourage as many of you as possible to double up.

Presentations will be given on Tuesdays during the second half of the semester (dates listed below). You must choose the topic and date for your presentation, and consult with me on sources, before Friday, October 5. We will try to spread things out so that there are no more than four students presenting in a given week. Presentations will count for a portion of your participation grade, and the phenomena you discuss may be incorporated into the final exam.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tues, Oct 23</td>
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<td>Tues, Oct 30</td>
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<td>Tues, Nov 6</td>
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<td>Tues, Nov 27</td>
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COURSE OUTLINE

The following outline lists the subjects I intend to cover in this course and the order in which I plan to cover them. We will be setting the pace as we go along, so I have not assigned specific dates when readings must be completed. These will be decided on in class.

A note on readings

There is no textbook for this class. Instead, we will be reading extracts from various different textbooks, together with journal articles and other materials. Readings are listed after each unit, in the approximate order in which you should tackle them, with more elementary readings (usually from textbooks) given first, followed by more technical readings. Readings are required unless listed as optional. Other readings may be added as we go along.

All book chapters are available through print reserve and/or e-reserve. Journal articles can be found in the Bound Periodicals section of the library, or on e-reserve. Articles from the journal Language are also available on-line through JSTOR, where they can be downloaded for printing on Reed networked computers. To access these articles, just go to the Reed Library homepage and click on “Print & E-Journals”. Then find the name of the journal (it’s listed under “Language (Baltimore)” and click on the JSTOR link. Once in JSTOR you can search for the article by title, author, or keyword. Ask for help from library staff if you get stuck.

[N.B. — The syllabus includes two separate Language articles by Hopper and Thompson, so be sure you’re reading the correct one. Also, there are two separate editions of Croft’s book Typology and Universals on reserve for the course. I have assigned you chapter 1 and portions of chapters 2-3 from the second edition, and chapter 4 of the first edition. These editions are very different from each other, so be sure you have the right version before you start reading the chapter in question.]

1. INTRODUCTION: TYPOLOGY AND UNIVERSALS

Cross-linguistic variation – Overview of typology – Methods of language sampling – The question of cross-linguistic comparability – Language universals (and ‘universal tendencies’) – Formulating language universals – Overview of Greenberg’s word order universals

1. Whaley, Introduction to Typology, chapter 1 “Introduction to typology and universals” (pp. 3-17), chapter 2 “A (brief) history of typology” (pp. 18-29). <P204.W48 1997>

2. Croft, Typology and Universals (2nd ed.), chapter 1 “Introduction” (pp. 1-30) <P204.C7 2002 / e-reserve>

3. Comrie, Language Universals and Linguistic Typology, chapter 1 “Language universals” (pp. 1-29), chapter 2 “Language typology”, sections 2.1-2.2 (pp. 33-42) [this reading is optional, but I recommend you at least skim it] <P204.C6 1989 or P204.C6 1981 / e-reserve (chapter 2 only)>

4. Greenberg, Universals of Language (2nd ed.), chapter 5 “Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements” (pp. 73-113) [focus on sections 1-4] <P23.C65 1961 / e-reserve>

5. Croft, Typology and Universals (2nd ed.), chapter 3 “Implicational universals and competing motivations”, sections 3.1-3.2 (pp. 49-59) <P204.C7 2002>

2. MORPHOLOGY AND THE LEXICON: CATEGORIES AND MARKING

Linguistic types and marking strategies – Sapir’s morphological types – On the notion ‘word’ – Lexical classes (part-of-speech systems) – Criteria for distinguishing and comparing lexical classes: noun, verb, adjective – Grammatical categories – Markedness theory – Head-marking versus dependent-marking (Nichols)
3. GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS: TRANSITIVITY, CASE/AGREEMENT, HIERARCHIES

Grammatical versus thematic and pragmatic relations – Predicate-argument structure and valency – Case/agreement systems: accusative, ergative, split ergative, and active systems – Relation-changing operations: passive and antipassive, causative, applicative, direct/inverse, obviation – Animacy and definiteness effects – Incorporation (Mithun) – Transitivity as scalar property (Hopper & Thompson)


(19) Song, Linguistic Typology, chapter 3 “Case marking”, sections 3.1–3.4 (pp. 138–156) < P204.S66 2001 / e-reserve >


(21) Song, Linguistic Typology, chapter 3 “Case marking”, sections 3.5–3.10 (pp. 156–181) < P204.S66 2001 / e-reserve >


4. WORD ORDER VARIATION

Determining ‘basic’ constituent order – Major/minor constituent order types – Non-configurationality (Mithun) – Greenberg’s word order correlations revisited – Refinements to the Greenbergian typology (Dryer) – Explaining word order universals (Travis, Hawkins) – Non-configurationality revisited (Baker)

(28) **Whaley**, *Introduction to Typology*, chapter 6 “Determining basic constituent order” (pp. 96–107) < P204.W48 1997 >


