

LOT Summer School 2003 course description

Name

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Title of the course

Typology: interpreting world-wide patterns of variation

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Course Level:

introductory

Course Description

The linguistic structures of the world's languages vary widely, though not indefinitely. What does it mean that some constructions are commonly found among the world's languages? And what does it tell us that other constructions are only attested in one or two seemingly exceptional languages? Do such observations really mean something, or are we tricked by numbers once again? One way to tackle linguistic diversity is to investigate a large sample of the world's languages and to compile a typology. In this course, the do's and don'ts of such typological investigation will be discussed. What we need is a balance between oversimplistic universalism and radical relativism.

In the first part of the course, we will discuss the practical aspects of compiling a typology. As an example, I will present the typology of person marking, showing which patterns are common and which are rare. In the second part of the course, various problems will be discussed that come up in the interpretation of such typological data. The influence of factors like large-areal consistency, long term stability and ease of borrowing, but also basic chance effects in the distribution of frequencies are much too often ignored - possibly leading to wrong interpretations of results.

Day-to-day Program

Monday: *Doing typology.* History, methodology and current approach to the typology of person marking. Presentation of major structures.

Tuesday: *Variability.* Presentation of minor and rare structures of person marking. Discussion about how to deal with variability in a theory of linguistic structure.

Wednesday: *Universals?* Problems with the interpretation of typological patterns as showing universals of human language.

Thursday: *Implicational Universals?* Even implicational universals turn out to have severe methodological problems.

Friday: *Using variation.* Variation can be interpreted diachronically. Does this show a way out of the methodological problems that we have encountered?

Literature / References

Course readings:

Monday and Tuesday

- Thomas, David D. (1955) 'Three analyses of the Ilocano pronoun system.' *Word* 11(2): 204-208.
- McKay, Graham R. (1978) 'Pronominal person and number categories in Rembarrnga and Djeebbana.' *Oceanic Linguistics* 17: 27-37.
- Chapter 4 of: Mühlhäusler, Peter & Rom Harré (1990) *Pronouns and People: the Linguistic construction of social and personal identity.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Wednesday and Thursday:

- Dryer, Matthew S. (1989) 'Large Linguistic Areas and Language Sampling.' *Studies in Language* 13(2): 257-292.
- Dryer, Matthew S. (1997) 'Why Statistical Universals are better than Absolute Universals.' *Chicago Linguistic Society* 33(2): 123-145.
- Cysouw, Michael (2002) 'Interpreting Typological Clusters.' *Linguistic Typology* 6(1): 69-93.
- Cysouw, Michael (2003) 'Against implicational universals.' *Linguistic Typology* 7(1).

Further readings:

- Cysouw, Michael (2003) *The paradigmatic structure of person marking.* (Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Forchheimer, Paul (1953) *The Category of Person in Language.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

- Greenberg, Joseph H. (1993) 'The second person is rightly so called.' In: *Principles and Prediction: the analysis of natural language. Papers in the honor of Gerald Sanders*, Mushira Eid & Gregory Iverson (eds.), pp. 9-24. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ingram, David (1978) 'Typology and Universals of Personal Pronouns.' In: *Universals of Human Language, Vol. 3: word structure*, Joseph H. Greenberg (ed.), pp. 213-248. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter & Rom Harré (1990) *Pronouns and People: the Linguistic construction of social and personal identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.