

TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

Typology is concerned with

- establishing what types of systems are possible in natural language,
- investigation of structural similarities among languages that are not genetically related.

Languages may be classified on the basis of their type.

In 1818 A. Schlegel proposed a typological classification of languages -- still very influential!

Languages may be **analytic** (**isolated** or **root** -- no inflection!): e.g. Vietnamese, Chinese

synthetic (inflectional) : e.g. Latin, Russian

agglutinative: e.g. Turkish, Finnish (transitional type)

Study the examples on p. 97.

Sapir: introduced the term **polysynthetic** (e.g. Amerindian languages)

Linguists today involved in comparative reconstruction take a keen interest in typological studies .

typological plausibility



a reconstruction should be plausible from a typological point of view

Phonological typology

The three-vowel system in (a) is more usual and common than the one in (b) and thus may be a better reconstruction.

a.	i	u	b.	i	u
	a			e	

On the basis of the typological plausibility criterion the PIE obstruent system has not been accepted by many linguists because:

The reconstruction is typologically questionable in two respects:

1. Reconstructed forms with PIE *b are very rare; typically, if there is a gap in the labial system, it is the voiceless stop that is missing.
2. Traditional reconstruction posits a series of voiced aspirated stops, but no corresponding voiceless aspirated stops: some typologists argue that all languages which have a voiced series also have the voiceless one.

(Study the Handout)

The recent reconstruction is more plausible, because

- it avoids the problem with the aspirated stops,
- it is common for languages with an ejective series to lack the labial.

Problem: because our knowledge of the world's languages is still limited, we cannot be certain that a pattern we have not yet observed is impossible or just rare.

For example, a few languages have been found with the characteristics attributed to PIE by the traditional reconstruction. These languages have labial gaps in the voiced series (e.g. languages in the Athabaskan and Caddoan families).

MORPHOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY

In addition to the typology by A. Schlegel (see above), there have been several models, all centering on morphology:

F. Finck (1867-1910)

- eight morphological types;
- also, he classified languages on the basis of the relationship between **situation** and the **expression of it in the language**.
(see pp. 101-102)

SYNTACTIC TYPOLOGY

Much of the work on syntactic universals has centered on word order in simple declarative sentences.

The three most common word orders (in descending order of frequency) are SOV, SVO, and VSO. Over 95 percent of the world's languages use one of these patterns as their basic word order.

Word order universals: the order of elements within one kind of structure has implications for the arrangement of elements in other structures → implicational universals!

Example: If VSO, then prepositions rather than postpositions ; if SOV, then postpositions rather than prepositions.

PIE word order and typology:

Although there is good comparative evidence that word order in PIE was SOV, some linguists argue, that PIE was not a genuine SOV-type language. (RCs in SVO languages are introduced by relative pronouns).

Argument: If SOV, then RC are placed before the noun they modify, and does not have RPs.

PIE, as originally reconstructed, had RCs which were introduced by relative pronouns. Thus, RC formation seems to be at variance with the usual patterns of SOV languages. Because of this, some argue that PIE could not have been an SOV language.

Problem:

The typological basis for these claims had been established on an incomplete language sample. More recent investigations have shown that SOV languages may employ several other strategies for RC formation. For example, Dravidian is a highly consistent SOV

language family, yet it has recently been shown to have inherited RC strategy of a different type (see the Handout).

It appears that the earliest evidence of Indo-Iranian, Hittite, Greek, and Latin indicates that the RC strategy of PIE was the same as in the Dravidian example. So PIE with SOV and RC structures that employ RP may be typologically “natural”.

CONTENTIVE TYPOLOGY (study pp. 106-108)



attention to **content** as well as to syntax and morphology

Contentive typology distinguishes two classes of Language:

- a. Government is the basic process: **accusative** or **ergative** type languages
- b. The basic process is agreement sets: **animate nouns and active verbs**, or **inanimate nouns and stative verbs**.