LINGUISTICS 407
Historical Linguistics LECTURE #5

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).

↓

maintain stems distinct from affixes – clear morpheme boundaries!

Compare the paradigms for *road* and *bird* in Turkish (agglutinative) and Latin (synthetic):

Nominative	yol	via	kus	avis
Genitive	yolun	viae	kusun	avis
Dative	yola	viae	kusa	avi:
Accusative	yolu	viam	kusu	avem
Ablative	yoldan	via:	kustan	avi:

In Latin, the endings merged with the stem vowel.

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.

PIE had a fifteen-stop inventory **(p. 56):**

voiceless	labial, dental, palatal, velar, labiovelar
voiced	labial, dental, palatal, velar, labiovelar
voiced aspirated	labial, dental, palatal, velar, labiovelar

Glottalic Theory:

voiceless stops	labial, dental, palatal, velar, labiovelar
ejectives	(labial) dental, palatal, velar, labiovelar
voiced (unaspirated)	labial, dental, palatal, velar, labiovelar

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

Problems:

(i) 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).

(ii) lack of direct comparative evidence for ejectives in PIE – only one IE language, Ossetic has ejectives, resulting from a recent development.

(iii) *b is *uncommon* in IE languages, but not *absent*.

Most Indo-European linguist reject the Glottalic Theory.

Study 3.10-3.11 on pp. 59-60.

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.**

Example*: he is coming*
two elements: an actor and an action

Inuit	one word includes several elements of the situation
Chinese	matching two components – *ta lai*
Turkish	intermediate between Inuit and Chinese: *geliyor*
English	three words: *he is coming*

etc.

Marr (1864-1934): root-isolating languages are most primitive --- WRONG!!! Why?

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 then 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 the RC is placed before the noun it modifies, 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 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".

Study 8.12-8.15, pp. 156-158.