

**Linguistics 148**  
**Spring Term 2010**

**LANGUAGE UNIVERSALS AND LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY**

Time: Tu and Thu, 11am-12 pm  
Place: TBA  
Instructor: Maria Polinsky, [polinsky@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:polinsky@fas.harvard.edu)  
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A better title for this course would be “Why are natural languages so similar?”... The overarching goal is to demonstrate these similarities and to show that differences across languages are predictable to some degree. The reason we cannot predict everything is partly because the field is still very young, and partly because linguists are still much in disagreement as to what can and cannot exist. Lately, it has become quite fashionable to deny the existence of language universals (at the end of the course, we will read and discuss a series of papers on that topic); at the risk of being behind the times, we will still look into the concepts and ideas which underlie the study of language universals and use those concepts to understand the universal design of natural language. In many linguistics courses this is done by examining one language; in this course, we will be looking at a number of languages.

The course will cover the following core areas (their list does not reflect the order of issues we will discuss):

- A. *Phenomena*: word order; case marking; agreement; lexical categories (functional vs notional; noun-verb distinction); special status of subject/topic and the structure of the left periphery of the clause; cross-clausal dependencies
- B. *Tools*: basics of linguistic analysis, sampling techniques, universals, hierarchies
- C. *Explanations*: why are languages similar?—is that an illusion, a consequence of universal grammar, a consequence of functional and communicative pressures, a consequence of general cognitive constraints (~processing), all/none of the above?

**Requirements:**

Regular attendance; in-class presentations of language data (see Language Focus below), completion of written assignments, and analytical presentation of at least one assigned paper. Grades will be based roughly 50% on the assignments, 25% on the paper presentation, and 25% on class participation including language focus presentations. Assignments must be turned in on time. Be prepared to discuss assignments in class if briefly.

All written work must give word-for-word and, where applicable, morpheme-by-morpheme, glosses of examples in languages other than English, as well as translations of these examples. Many of your readings will provide you with models of how this is done, but there is no single standard for glossing. If primary sources you are using do not provide glosses, you will have to use your own discretion to determine the amount of detail that is necessary. A rule of thumb is that glosses should provide any information relevant to the point an example is intended to illustrate; don't take anything for granted but do not overwhelm your reader with unnecessary details. A helpful website with glossing rules:

<http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/files/morpheme.html>

**Focus study language**

In order for you to get first-hand exposure to typological research, a lecture in which I introduce a particular phenomenon will be followed by subsequent class presentations data illustrating the instantiation of that phenomenon in a language of your choice. The presentations are intended to foster discussion of the following questions: How do various languages fit in with existing typological analyses of the relevant phenomenon? Do class findings require a refinement of these analyses? So that everyone can get as much as possible out of the presentations, make sure to prepare a handout containing the crucial data.

For this purpose, you will be expected to pick a language to focus on for the term. The language should be one that is either completely unfamiliar to you, one that you know passively, or one that you have studied formally for under a year. (Of course, you are welcome to contribute observations regarding other languages you are familiar with to class discussion.) In choosing a language, you should make sure that the library has sufficient reference materials available, including a dictionary, with grammatical information and a reference grammar; you are also free to use secondary sources if they are available.<sup>1</sup> We will be referring to the language of your choice as the *focus study language* (FSL).

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<sup>1</sup> You will probably want to avoid a language that involves morphology that is so complicated that you won't be able to easily determine the internal structure of words, as well as a language where all materials are written in an unfamiliar writing system. It is always tempting to pick a very 'exotic' language. Resist the temptation, and try to choose a language with good available descriptions and/or consultants whom you can ask if need be. ☺

***Books we will be using***

- Comrie, B. (1989) *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL. **Second edition.** (LULT)
- Newmeyer, Frederick. 1998. *Language form and language function*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Hawkins, John A., ed. (1988) *Explaining Language Universals*. Oxford: Blackwell. (ELU)
- Hawkins, John A. 2004. *Efficiency and complexity in grammars*. Oxford: OUP. (ECG)
- Palmer, F.R. (1994) *Grammatical Roles and Relations*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Shopen, Timothy, ed. (1985) *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*. Vols. 1-3. Cambridge University Press Cambridge, UK.
- Whaley, Lindsay. (1997). *Introduction to typology*. Thousand Oaks—London: Sage Publications.
- World atlas of language structures* (2005), ed. by Martin Haspelmath, Matthew Dryer, David Gil, and Bernard Comrie. (WALS)  
Oxford: Oxford University Press ; online version 2008: <http://www.wals.info/>

***A note on the readings: Main readings will be discussed in class and will help you in your work on problem sets. Additional readings are for your future reference—my goal is to show you what is available and although I hope you will do some of those readings, I will also be delighted if you turned to them later in your future work. Some of the less accessible readings will be posted on the course website.***

*Syllabus*

Week, class number: date	Topic	Main readings: PLEASE NOTE THE ORDER IN WHICH THE READING FOR A GIVEN WEEK ARE PRESENTED--IT IS NOT ARBITRARY	Additional readings	Assignment
<b>Part 1: BASICS</b>				
<b>1.1: Jan 26</b>	Introduction	General discussion and structure of the course		
<b>1.2: Jan 28</b>	Approaches to cross-linguistic variation. Goals of typology; methodology of cross-linguistic analysis. Place of typology in linguistic theory.	LULT, Ch. 2  Newmeyer, Ch. 1	<i>Linguistic Typology</i> 10 (2007)--various articles on the future and role of typology	<i>Decide on your FSL, provide a short explanation of why you chose it and describe what sources you will be using</i>
<b>2.1: Feb 2</b>	Sampling	Dryer, Matthew. 1989. Large linguistic areas and language sampling. <i>Studies in Language</i> 13: 257-92.  Rijkhoff, Jan et. al. 1993. A method of language sampling. <i>Studies in Language</i> 17: 169-203.	Articles by Maslova, Dryer, Perkins, Schweiger in <i>Linguistic Typology</i> 4, 3 (2000)	Assignment 1: sampling  <i>Due Tues, Feb 9</i>
<b>2.2: Feb 4</b>	Classification	LULT, Ch. 1.2  Nichols, Johanna. 1986. 'Head-marking and dependent-marking grammar.' <i>Language</i> 62: 56-119.		
<b>3.1: Feb 9</b>	Functional explanations: Grammaticalization, economy, iconicity, markedness.	Haiman, John. 1983. Iconic and economic motivation. <i>Language</i> 59: 781-819  Newmeyer, Ch. 3		Assignment 2: Marshallese  <i>Due Feb16</i>

<b>Part 2: WORD ORDER TYPOLOGY</b>				
<b>3.2 and 4.1: Feb 11 and Feb 16</b>	Word order typology: Determining basic constituent order and word order universals. Headedness.	LULT, Ch. 4  ECG, Ch. 2, 5	<p>Greenberg, Joseph. 1963. Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements (online)</p> <p>Kayne, Richard. 1994. <i>The antisymmetry of syntax</i>. Cambridge: MIT Press.</p> <p>Rizzi, Luigi. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman, ed. <i>Elements of Grammar</i>. Dordrecht: Kluwer.</p> <p>Yamashita, Hiroko, and Franklin Chang. 2001. "Long before short" preference in the production of a head-final language. <i>Cognition</i> 81(2): B45-B55. <a href="http://email.eva.mpg.de/%7Echang/papers/jheavyNP.pdf">http://email.eva.mpg.de/%7Echang/papers/jheavyNP.pdf</a></p> <p>Lupyan, Gary, and Morten Christiansen. 2002. Case, word order, and language learnability: Insights from connectionist modeling. <i>Proc. of the 24th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society</i>, 596-601.</p>	<p>Assignment 3: FSL— Word order sketch</p> <p><i>To be presented in week 4, on Feb 18</i></p>
<b>4.2: Feb 18</b>		Presentations of FSL word orders		

<b>Part 3: LEXICAL CATEGORIES</b>				
<b>5.1-5.2: Feb 23, 25</b>	Principles of lexical categorization (parts of speech)	Shopen, vol. 1, ch. 1 (Schachter's chapter on parts of speech)  Baker, Mark. 2003. <i>Lexical categories</i> . Cambridge: CUP, ch. 1 (sections 1.1-1.3), ch. 2 (sections 2.1-2.2, everything else optional), ch. 3 (sections 3.1-3.6)		Assignment 4: FSL— Main lexical categories  <i>Due March 2</i>
<b>6.1-6.2: Mrch 2, 4</b>	Case marking. Case stacking. Case assignment	LULT, ch. 5-6  Tsunoda, Tasaku. 1981. Split case marking patterns. <i>Linguistics</i> 19: 389-139  Yoon, James. 2004. Non-nominative (major) subjects and case stacking in Korean. In P. Bhaskararao and K. V. Subbarao eds., <i>Non-nominative Subjects</i> , Volume 2, 265-314. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <a href="http://www.linguistics.uiuc.edu/jyoon/Papers/yoo.pdf">http://www.linguistics.uiuc.edu/jyoon/Papers/yoo.pdf</a>	Blake, Barry. 1994. Case. Cambridge: CUP. Ch. 5, 2 (in that order)  Comrie, Bernard, and Maria Polinsky. 1998. The great Dagestanian case hoax. In Siewerska and Sung (eds.). <i>Case, typology and grammar</i> , 95-114. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.  Keenan, Edward L. 1984. Semantic correlates of the ergative/absolute distinction. <i>Linguistics</i> 22: 197-222.	Assignment 5: FSL, case marking; if your FSL does not have case marking, what does it use to encode relations standardly encoded by case?  <i>Due March 9</i>

<b>Part 4: ELEMENTS OF CLAUSE STRUCTURE. ROOT CLAUSE</b>				
<b>7.1-7.2: Mrch 9, 11</b>	Agreement	Charles Ferguson and Michael Barlow. 1988. Introduction. In Michael Barlow and Charles Ferguson, eds. <i>Agreement in natural language</i> . Stanford, CSLI  Polinsky, Maria. 2003. Non-canonical agreement is canonical. <i>Transactions of the Philological Society</i> . 101: 279-312.	Wechsler, Stephen, and Larisa Zlatić. 2000. A theory of agreement and its application to Serbo-Croatian. <i>Language</i> 76: 799-832.  Chung, Sandra. 1998. <i>The design of agreement</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. <b>Chapter 5 only</b>	Assignment 6: agreement in Yimas  <i>Due after spring break, March 23</i>

**March 13—21: SPRING BREAK**

<p><b>8.1-8.2:</b> <b>Mrch 23, 25</b></p>	<p>Subjects and topics. VP-internal subjects. The universality of subject (EPP)</p>	<p>Subjects: I will provide a detailed handout and assign some extra readings depending on your general level of linguistic preparation.</p> <p>Topics: Kiss, Katalin E. 1995. Discourse configurational languages. Introduction. In K. Kiss, ed. <i>Discourse configurational languages</i>, 3-27. Oxford: OUP.</p>	<p>Rizzi, Luigi. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman, ed. <i>Elements of Grammar</i>. Dordrecht: Kluwer.</p>	<p>Assignment 7: FSL: Subject properties and agreement (if agreement is available)</p> <p><i>To be presented in week 9</i></p>
<p><b>9.1-9.2:</b> <b>Mrch 30, Apr 1</b></p>		<p>Evidence for subject/topic in your FSL? Presentations</p>		

<b>PART 5: CROSS-CLAUSAL PHENOMENA</b>				
<b>10.1-10.2: Apr. 6, 8</b>	Relativization	Keenan & Comrie. 1977. Noun phrase accessibility and Universal Grammar. <i>LI</i> 8: 63-99.  Miyamoto, Edson, and Michiko Nakamura. 2003. Subject/Object asymmetries in the processing of relative clauses in Japanese. <i>WCCFL</i> 22: 342-355.	LULT, Ch. 7  ECG, Ch. 7	Assignment 8: relative clauses in Irish  <i>Due April 13</i>
<b>11.1-11.2: Apr 13, 15</b>	Wh-questions	I will provide a detailed handout and assign some extra readings depending on your general level of linguistic preparation.		Assignment 9: FSL—strategies of question formation  <i>Due April 20</i>
<b>12.1-12.2, 13: Apr. 20, 22, 27</b>	Explanations for language universals and the future of typology	Evans and Levinson. 2009. The myth of language universals: Language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> (BBS) 32, 429-492  After the initial presentation which I will make, we will continue with a seminar-style discussion where class members will be asked to construct arguments for and against particular explanations	Commentaries on Evans & Levinson in BBS 32(5)—I recommend you pick at least one commentary that is pro and one that is con; it may be interesting comparing their argumentation  Even further readings Baker, Mark C. 1996. <i>The Polysynthesis Parameter</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 11 (on the nature of parametrization)  Newmeyer, Ch. 1, 2  Polinsky & Kluender 2007. Linguistic typology and theory construction. <i>Linguistic typology</i> 11.	