

Chapter 3

Some typology: sameness and difference

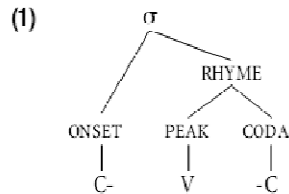


Language universals

- There are many aspects that are shared among languages
 - e.g. certain sounds/structures are very common
 - or stages of acquisition
- Why?
 - whatever languages have in common is **universal**; the explanation for universality is that this is **hard-wired** in our brains, **innate** [Chomsky]
 - neurological, physiological, physical and social conditions under which languages **arose** and **developed** [and are **used**] are the same / similar across humans, so the "forces" that determine language structure are the same

Differences across languages

- Number and types of segments: from small (11, Rotokas) to large (141, !Xu) (segments=sounds)
 - sets of segments may be different
- Combinations of segments into **syllables**
 - peak=nucleus
 - rhyme=rime



Different syllable structures

1. The onset may be obligatory (CV or V)
 - all languages have CV: **core** syllable
2. There may be a coda (CV or CVC)
3. The onset and/or coda may be complex (CV or CCV, CVCC)
4. The peak may be complex (CV or CVV)

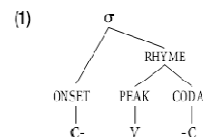
Different phonological rules

Phonological rule: what happens if two morphemes are joined together

- English: n → m / p,b,m
 - i[m] bed "nasal assimilation"
 - Chinese 兼并 (with m or n?) 镇平, 金科
- German: "final devoicing": Rad [-t] b,d,g → p,t,k end of the word
- Chinese: "tone sandhi" rule: if two tones 3 follow each other, the first one turns into tone 2, e.g. 你好

Universals

- All languages have syllables, and make a distinction between consonants and vowels
 - do all languages have the same basic syllable structure? (i.e. that in figure 1?)
 - Or are there also languages in which Onset and Peak form a unit?, or in which there is no evidence for Syllable / 'Rhyme'?



Universals, cont.

- All languages have at least two consonants of the set [p t k]
- All languages have an open vowel
- List of universals:
<http://phonotactics.anu.edu.au/features.php>
<http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro/>

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Tendencies

“near-universals”:

- Nearly all languages have [t]
 - Almost all languages have sonorants
 - Coronal place of articulation is much more common than any other place of articulation
- segment sets are structured (implications)
- No language has [z] without also having [s]
 - If a language has many consonants then it also *tends* to have many vowels

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Counting segments

- Not at all easy to establish “the” segments of a language
 - loan phonemes
 - Chinese [v] ?
 - English nasal vowels ? e.g. in restaurant
 - analysis, abstractness
 - English [ŋ], [t]

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System gaps

- Stop systems of Dutch and Japanese:

p	t	k	-	t	k
b	d	-	b	d	g
Dutch			(older) Japanese		
and some other languages					

Why?

- [g] is (relatively) hard to produce
- [p] is (relatively) hard to hear

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Speaker and hearer

- ‘Don’t make things difficult for the speaker’ and ‘Don’t make things difficult for the listener’. That is, the best systems are those in which contrasts are **maximally distinct** with the least amount of **articulatory effort**
 - nice kind of balance, equilibrium

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Conclusion

- Languages show many similarities in their sound structure
 - not an accident
 - “universals” and tendencies
 - explainable from phonetic and/or a usage point of view
 - structural universals? or structure=universal?
 - language acquisition

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Homework

- Read the chapter very carefully. If there are things that are not clear, ask in class next week
- Homework exercises: Qs 18-24 ☺
- Thank you