

## Phonological typology and rare features

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The last two decades have seen three major shifts in typological studies:

— Typological research is becoming more geographically and historically grounded. The main question of typology shifts from “what is possible in the human language in general?” to “what’s where why?”, i.e. to the distributional aspect of the universals (Bickel 2007, 2015). Instead of taking isolated languages and features, typologists look into the whole genetic groups or families and for the correlations between variables. First, this allows one to trace the historical evolutionary paths of attested synchronic distributions and to explain the synchronic universals (Bybee 2001, Blevins 2004, 2015, Kiparsky 2008: 52, Hyman 2018: 16). Second, it makes it possible to look into the variability within certain parameters that might be cross-linguistically rare but typical for certain genetic groupings of languages (Kibrik 2003).

— Another current trend sees a shift from languages as the minimal units of typological analysis towards the features in these languages and further on, from the features towards the parameters and variables characterising these features. The more parameters are considered, the more it becomes evident that in the most typical instances of the features, different parameters converge on one point. On the other hand, however, not all parameters converge and not always. Therefore, there is a whole range of more central to more marginal, peripheral cases. This method was explicated as early as in Bazell (1952, 1954) for phonology, and is now explored e.g. in the Canonical typology (Corbett 2003a, 2007, 2015, Bond 2019, Nichols 2019) and the Multivariate (or Distributional) Typology (Bickel and Nichols 2002, Bickel 2015).

3. The advance of computational and statistical methods has also changed typology (Bickel 2011, 2015). They allow for creating versatile databases and for counting probabilities instead of drawing categorical lines, weight the influence of various factors in typological distributions etc. Rather than just saying “yes/no” about the belonging of a particular instance to a particular category on the basis of arbitrarily chosen few criteria, we can now collect all possible criteria and see to what extent a certain instance belongs to a certain category according to each criterium. The convergence level of the criteria can be numerically expressed, as well as assessed as below or above chance.

These three major developments in typology, however, come at their cost. In order to run a meticulous process of criteria collection and the data assessment according to each scale across the entire language groups, one needs sufficiently more time per unit that has been previously spent. It becomes significantly more laborious to collect very large typological databases in this way. Moreover, in many cases one can rely even less on the primary data compiled by earlier researchers than in more superficial typological studies. Researchers who deeply explore canonical and other parametric methods, therefore, often limit themselves to smaller datasets and sometimes to the intragenetic typology (cf. a set of just 15 languages in Corbett 2003b, who explicitly opposes his method of very detailed field-based descriptions to a larger-scale but more superficial data collection, or 15 Australian and Mesoamerican languages in Macklin-Cordes and Round 2015 and Tallman 2019 respectively, or 28 Uralic languages in Pajusalu et al. 2018).

When the set is very limited, a natural focus would be especially on critical and challenging cases. Rare features or rare instances of the features can challenge existing generalisations and theories in an especially efficient way. A specific interest towards rarities and exceptions as a source of valuable contributions to the general theory arose in linguistics in the beginning of 2000s (Plank 2000, Wohlgenuth and Cysouw (eds.) 2010a, b; Simon and Wiese (eds.) 2011, Golovko et al. (eds.) 2015). Looking into the evolutionary path of the emergence or disappearance of the rarities was proposed as one of the ways to explain them (Blevins 2004: 192-214, Round 2019). Originally, rarities were seen as something unnatural with respect to the “natural” language laws. However, with an exponential rise of research on the evolutionary aspect of both universals and rarities, a trend towards “de-exoticising” the rarities is observed. The talk will discuss the recent examples (and their theoretical premises) of such small typological samples that concentrate on rare and often “non-canonical” features in phonology, cf. for example, Blevins and Wedel (2009), Anderson (2016), Easterday (2017), Blevins (2018).

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