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UNIVERSALS OF LANGUAGE TODAY

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To Edoardo Vineis
amicitiae tuae memores atque grati

Preface

This book collects the contributions presented at the international congress held at the University of Bologna in January 2007, where leading scholars of different persuasions and interests offered an up-to-date overview of the current status of the research on linguistic universals.

The papers that make up the volume deal with both theoretical and empirical issues, and range over various domains, covering not only morphology and syntax, which were the major focus of Greenberg's seminal work, but also phonology and semantics, as well as diachrony and second language acquisition.

Diverse perspectives illustrate and discuss a huge number of phenomena from a wide variety of languages, not only exploring the way research on universals intersects with different subareas of linguistics, but also contributing to the ongoing debate between functional and formal approaches to explaining the universals of language.

This stimulating reading for scientists, researchers and postgraduate students in linguistics shows how different, but not irreconcilable, modes of explanation can complement each other, both offering fresh insights into the investigation of unity and diversity in languages, and pointing to exciting areas for future research.

- A fresh and up-to-date survey of the present state of research on Universals of Language in an international context, with original contributions from leading specialists in the field.
- First-hand accounts of substantive findings and theoretical observations in different subareas of linguistics.
- Huge number of linguistic phenomena and data from different languages analyzed and discussed in detail.
- Essential reading for scientists, researchers and postgraduate students in linguistics.

Università di Bologna
Italy

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Introduction

Since Greenberg's 1963 seminal work, research has constantly provided fresh insights into the exploration of unity and diversity in the realm of languages.

As is well known, a major idea that emerges from the 45 universals is that cross-linguistic variation is to some extent limited by the fact that certain items and structures in language systems are dependent on one another. And in its quest for the bounds of linguistic variability, the study of linguistic universals is closely linked to typological research, which defines and compares the traits and the patterns that languages share, producing the data upon which cross-linguistic generalizations are made.

Four decades of systematic language sampling and investigations greatly contributed to ascertain dependency relationships and co-variation between elements across languages, whereas considerable effort has also been expended to seek explanations for the way universals, both absolute and implicational, intervene to shape the limits of linguistic diversity. As a result, an enormous amount of empirical data and literature provides present-day linguistics with multiple perspectives and issues concerning those phenomena and correlations that in world's languages significantly occur "with more than chance frequency".

This very expression inspired the international congress held at the University of Bologna in January 2007, where contributions presented by leading scholars offered an up-to-date overview of the current status of the research on linguistic universals as instantiated in works that deal with both theoretical and empirical issues, and illustrate diverse modes of explanation.

Greenberg's insights have been incorporated in much linguistic work, not only in functional-typological approach but in generative-formal approach as well. And programmatically, the conference brought together linguists of different persuasions and interests, in order to determine to what extent the various kinds of explanation complement each other, and to what extent they can shed light on the interplay between research on universals and recent developments in the different areas of lin-

This volume is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague Edoardo Vineis, who was one of the organizers of the Conference on the Universals of Language but passed away suddenly in August 2007.

guistics.¹ In fact, the articles collected in this volume range over different domains, covering not only morphology and syntax, which were the major focus of Greenberg's inspiring article, but also phonology and semantics, as well as diachrony and second language acquisition.

The overall trends of studies undertaken by scholars working with contemporary concepts of language typology reveal that the methods of analysis have greatly evolved, and the goals have correspondingly changed too.

Although Greenberg was quite cautious about the relevance of type classifications, and the import of correlations involving word order patterns, in the second half of the last century a great amount of literature consolidated the tradition concerning holistic language types, and a number of scholars managed to formulate hypotheses on implications, both speculating about idealized holistic principles (e.g. Lehmann 1973, 1978, Hawkins 1983), and exploring the interconnections between word-order and other structures (among others, Stassen 1985, Siewierska 1996, Haspelmath 1997).

The idea of 'deeper' explanations for word order universals turned out to be very attractive for generative linguists as well, who endeavored to discover broad correlations with underlying macroparameters, and overall motivations rooted in acquisition processes. Also, within the generative grammar framework many attempts have been made to refer some of the 45 universals to the notion of 'parameter', more specifically to the 'head-complement' parameter (Graffi 1980, Stowell 1981, Koopman 1983, Travis 1984, Coopmans 1985, Giorgi and Longobardi 1991).

In recent years, however, external critics and also insiders in both theoretical frameworks repeatedly observed the discrepancy between such ambitious purposes and the actual results. Evidently, these earlier objectives concerning broad cross-domain correlations and large-scale connections were not reachable: "It is illusory to think that linguistic diversity can be captured by a few holistic types, or a few word-order types, or a few parametric switches" (Haspelmath 2006: 17).

In consonance with this, in current research on universals the targets and the desired outcomes seem to be somewhat more restricted, since those generativists interested in grammar comparison tend to focus on microparameters (e.g. Kayne 1994) rather than on macroparameters, whereas functionalists tend to rely on correlations holding between elements in closely related constructions, rather than on large-scale implications (Haspelmath 2006).

And a notable shift of interest is observable in typology as well, which over the past decade has matured into a full-fledged discipline, with different objectives and with its own theories: "the new goal of typology is the development of theories that explain why linguistic diversity is the way it is" (Bickel 2007: 239).

The increasing appreciation of linguistic diversity in its own right amounts to a growing interest in geographical and historical investigations in order to explain

¹ In a similar vein, some recent works offer a balanced viewpoint in comparing and contrasting functional and formal perspectives in different areas: among others, Darnell et al. (1999) and Fischer (2007).

both the areal patterning of typological features and the qualitative and quantitative interrelations between typological distributions (e.g. Nichols 1992, Haspelmath et al. 2008). Accordingly, the essentials of contemporary typology are: “framework-neutral definitions, emphasis on codability in definitions and in applications of theory, bottom-up or data-driven constructs, and concern with observable phenomena that pattern interestingly in the world’s languages (in their frequency, their interaction with other parts of grammar, their geography, their history, etc.)” (Nichols 2007: 231).

Notwithstanding the attraction of the fascinating panorama of linguistic variation that unfolds in space and time, typological research does not disregard the general principles that underlie the superficial variety and shape its complexity. In fact, a number of overarching and particular issues concerning their finding and explanation are currently under debate, thus confirming that research on universals of language is still alive and well.

The papers collected here also focus on some major problems and perspectives, which will be briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

1 Universals and Grammatical Categories

Typological investigations have been largely based on the implicit assumption of a number of universal grammatical categories, relations and constructions, which are derived from the Latin and English grammatical tradition, notions such as parts of speech, passive, subject, direct object, relative clause, etc. The increasing attention devoted to the structural diversity displayed by human languages, however, entails a constant reassessment of existing taxonomies. And also, linguistic variability again and again demonstrates that these basic notions are extremely difficult to define in both formal and cross-linguistically valid terms (see the extensive discussion in Baker 2003).

As a consequence, the view that structural categories of grammar are universal has been variously interpreted, and more recently disputed by many linguists. The relevance of categorial concepts for the practice of linguistic typology is specifically focused in Dryer (1997), where the author posits the question whether grammatical relations are to be held either as fundamentally cross-linguistic or fundamentally language-particular concepts.

His claim that, from a functionalist view of language, the universality of structural categories is “at most a convenient fiction” (Dryer 1997: 117) is endorsed in Croft (2000) and (2001), where language-specific categories are assumed to reflect the prevalence of different and competing functional principles within the same grammatical domain.²

Strong arguments for radical language-particularity are also provided in Haspelmath’s (2007) article, which explicitly argues against the existence of pre-established

² See also the discussion in Cristofaro (forth).

categories. The awareness that categories are language-particular, he says, has important consequences for both language description and typology: the latter in particular should abandon category-based comparison in favor of substance-based comparison.

Conversely, in the same special issue of *Linguistic Typology*, Newmeyer's (2007) response to this proposal points out that, even granting the assumption that semantic concepts are universal, semantically based categorial assignments in language description are just as problematic as form-based assignments. Moreover, he maintains that cross-linguistic formal categories are empirically motivated and, indeed, necessary to typology.

With respect to parts of speech, also the detailed survey in Schachter and Shopen (2007) assumes that the primary criteria for their classification are not semantic, but grammatical: namely, properties like the word's distribution, its range of syntactic functions, and the morphological or syntactic categories for which it is specifiable.

In this volume, a further contribution to this crucial debate is provided by **Ramat**, whose balanced discussion starts from the fundamental role of categorization with respect to cognition processes, and looks for convergences in the somewhat sterile divide between universal formalism vs. relativistic functionalism.

Since the relevant properties of a category belong to different levels of the linguistic organization (semantic-functional, morphosyntactic, pragmatic, etc.), the author suggests that different criteria, not only formal, may help to make correct categorial assignments.

Furthermore, in spite of those obvious considerations, which seem to lead to an absolute relativity of categorial concepts, Ramat maintains that parts of speech can be considered as universal categories and good tools of analysis for all languages. Provided that the distinction is made between categories as theoretical concepts, abstractions used in linguistic analysis, and their practical, real implementations in natural languages.

2 Universals and Language Variability

In recent years, the emphasis placed on linguistic diversity promoted the constant refinement of the tools and the methods for language description, which entailed also the growing awareness that grand type notions are inadequate to capture the kaleidoscopic variability of human languages.

Accordingly, among modern typologists individual structural patterns, or large sets of fine-grained variables are preferably adopted as *comparanda*, whereas the traditional four-way morphological classification of languages, is generally ignored, if not overtly criticized.

In a similar vein, **Haspelmath's** paper specifically discusses the validity of the agglutination/fusion distinction by making explicit a number of implicit assumptions of earlier work, and by exposing these postulates to rigorous empirical testing. The use of these terms implies in fact assumptions concerning both the putative

homogeneity of the type within all areas of morphology, and the consistency with respect to three possibly correlating parameters: the Cumulation index, the Alternation index and the Suppletion index.

Yet, according to the scrutiny of the nominal and verbal inflectional morphology in a sample of 30 languages, the key-features of the composite types ‘agglutinating’ and ‘fusional’ do not show statistically significant correlations, and the results are thus largely negative with respect to the validity of the agglutination-fusion distinction.

Considering that, on the other hand, these parameters do show relevant values and effectively co-occur in Turkish and Latin, the so-called Agglutination Hypothesis seems just an expedient to capture the eccentricity of certain non-Indo-European languages, whereas Latinocentrism traditionally informed the ‘ideal’ type of fusional language.

Haspelmath’s study thus presents a strong challenge to those scholars who still want to maintain the traditional terminology. What’s more, it not only shows that future work on morphological typology will need to be more careful, but also gives empirical evidence that holistic typology and gross morphological types, insofar as they apply to entire languages, fail the test when confronted with the intrinsic variability that exists within and across human languages.

In the same perspective, the real scope of universals can be questioned as well. **Lahiri and Plank** address explicitly this crucial issue in a rich contribution that centers on the relationship between universals and language variability, as it results from individual lexical and grammatical innovations. Extensive evidence from the syntax, morphology, and phonology of many languages proves that coherent sets of entities do frequently violate a universal that remains true of the respective languages as a whole. As a consequence, universals are not perforce and axiomatically to be predicated of entire languages, and it is thus sensible to distinguish between different types of universals, depending on which kinds of representations they specifically constrain (Plank 2007).

On the other hand, if true universals of language are only those principles that pervasively and consistently influence all parts and all representations of forms and constructions, then we are forcibly left with a very few basic constraints that limits individual variations and linguistic diversity.

3 Universals and Phonology

The above-mentioned paper devotes plenty of space also to the reflection on universals and phonology. Admittedly, a fruitful typological approach to phonology cannot be confined to questions of phoneme inventories, but must also include cross-linguistic comparison on the basis of the relationship between the linguistic system and its external (phonetic) manifestation (Croft 2003: 19). In this regard, the further advantages of looking at feature systems are made clear in Lahiri’s excellent discussion concerning asymmetry in phonological systems.

The data provide evidence that asymmetry is inherent to features, feature distributions, and the direction of phonological rules; furthermore, the pervasiveness of featural asymmetry also extends to speech perception. Her analysis of this universal tendency is a fascinating illustration that avoids the possible unrepresentativeness of cross-linguistic data that language universals investigators usually work with, and also corroborates the view that the explanation for universals in phonology is likely to be found in articulatory, acoustic and also auditory phonetics.³

While phonology, as others areas of linguistics, is able to look at universals and typology with four decades of perspective, with respect to the study of prosodic structures systematic cross-linguistic investigation really started only about 20 years ago, when a full model of prosodic phonology was developed.

The core aspects of this sub-discipline are carefully outlined in **Vogel's** paper, which proposes ten possible universals of prosodic phonology by addressing both issues of abstract representation as well as the appearance of surface patterns. The article thus offers a well-articulated and detailed discussion of the interaction of formal and typological approaches to the study of the prosodic structure of language. The author considers the import of counter-examples, paying due attention both to the possibility of turning putative absolute universals into tendencies, and to the alternative of explaining them by more abstract (but independently justifiable) analyses. This pathbreaking work paves the way for further research and testing, which will certainly help to discover if additional properties of prosodic structures can qualify as universals of prosodic structure.

4 Universals and Morphology

In spite of its pioneering role in nineteenth century typology, in the second half of the last century morphology received relatively little attention, and still, the traditional taxonomies focused on the degree and the kind of morphology found across languages, are the idea that probably comes to mind first on hearing the term 'morphological typology'. Other aspects of the sub-discipline, on the other hand, seem to play indeed a minor role in typological studies, where morphology, as interface component of grammar par excellence, more often serves as the context for phonological processes, or as a diagnostic for the presence of morphosyntactic features (Baerman and Corbett 2007: 115).

This is probably due to the fact that morphology is in many respects a language-specific area, and so is even the very presence of a meaningful morphological component. Hence, in this field typologists are confronted with genuine difficulties in finding generalizable parameters of variation and organizing principles that are valid cross-linguistically.

Some recent typological surveys of word formation processes (Aikhenvald 2007) and inflectional morphology (Bickel and Nichols 2007), however, suggest that mor-

³ On this point see also the discussion in Croft (2003: 117–120).

phological typology is presently benefiting from conspicuous theoretical advances in the sub-discipline. A deeper comprehension of the crucial notion ‘word’, new insights into the nature of allomorphy and paradigms, as well as the increasing interest in the diachronic, functional and cognitive dimensions of morphology brought by grammaticalization studies,⁴ have now made it possible to provide typological investigations with firmer foundations and tools.

Three articles in this volume fully substantiate this renovated interest in morphological typology that, apart from holistic types, also implies a variety of dimensions along which we can typologize the world’s languages⁵.

By discussing the non-interruptability and non-accessibility of word-internal structure implied by a formal universal, the Lexical Integrity Principle, **Booij’s** paper offers an important contribution to our understanding of the notion ‘word’ in grammar. This article investigates *to what extent* the word is an atomic unit with respect to other grammatical levels, in particular to syntax and semantics.

On the basis of telling examples, the author argues that, while non-interruptability can be maintained as a defining property of canonical wordhood, non-accessibility, on the other hand, should be rejected on empirical grounds. Cases of real violation of non-interruptability are cross-linguistically marginal phenomena, but there is no doubt that the different modules of the grammar cannot be excluded from having access to word-internal structure. Therefore, the non-interruptability part of the Lexical Integrity Principle must be conceived as the default situation for natural languages, rather than as an absolute universal that forbids syntactic manipulation.

Absolute morphological universals are difficult to find probably because the language-specificity of morphological processes reflects the language-specificity of the lexicon, from which grammaticalization derives the materials for word formation.

With respect to compound formation, **Guevara and Scalise** approach the search for universals using a lexical database that is much more sophisticated in its classificatory parameters than most previous work on compounding.

This article attempts to advance both empirically and analytically the study of compounding, the latter for instance in its honest discussion of some putative universals. The idea of a head-parameter, for instance, offers a fruitful typological perspective, but the empirical data do not fully support this hypothesis. In the same vein, other alledged universals (e.g. the right hand head rule, the root-compounding parameter, etc.), are seriously questioned.

Compounding phenomena are thus another area where the behavior of the world’s languages seems to be governed by tendencies, rather than by universals of an absolute nature. But the domain of word formation, on the other hand,

⁴ See, for instance, Anderson (2005: 55): “[s]ome things that we find in the morphology of a language are there not because the language faculty requires them but because change tends to create them for independent reasons; while some things that are rare or perhaps even nonexistent are not to be found because there are few if any pathways that could produce them from an available source”.

⁵ Interesting observations in this regard can also be found in Brown (forth).

can provide evidence for implicational universals, such as the generalizations on the order and the morphological marking of inflectional categories proposed by Greenberg (1963). And the Universals Archive⁶ collects many cross-linguistic generalizations over form-function relations and asymmetries of this sort.

On the whole, cross-linguistic comparison of morphological forms has features as its major concern, a crucial and problematic area wherein typologists but also fieldworkers, computational linguists, and formal linguists tend to put increasing theoretical weight. In this book, the article by **Corbett** examines a number of aspects concerning the use of features and feature values both in individual language description and in typological comparison.

The discussion deals with two main questions: the *analysis problem* and the *correspondence problem*. The latter, which clearly reminds us of the more general problems of pre-established categories and their semantic comparability, is shown to have relevant consequences not only in cross-linguistic terms but also in intra-linguistic terms, for even within a single language, features and their values do not necessarily line up consistently. On the basis of well-selected examples, Corbett thus observes that greater care must be taken over these issues, identifying particular problems and solutions, but also showing the great advantages ensuing from such a scrupulous approach.

5 Universals and Syntax

The second area to which this book devotes three contributions is syntax, and this reflects the dominance of syntactic research in both Greenberg's most inspiring work and the last half-century linguistics in general.

Moreover, it is especially research on syntactic universals that has sparked off the debate between the functional-typological and the generative-formalist modes of explanation.

Croft's paper enters the debate by offering an excellent exposition of the crucial differences in methodology and argumentation. The author comes from the functionalist side, and his rigorous critique of the so-called "one language at a time" method, that is the tendency to focus in depth on a single language, and of the methodological opportunism adopted in many recent formal analyses, clearly points to the limits that the formalist mode of explanation inherited from structuralism.

The proposed five principles for a well-founded procedure in syntactic analysis and argumentation provide not only a valid defense from empirical disconfirmation, but also a sound endorsement of the functional-typological approach, and a major contribution to linguistic methodology as well.

Linguists working within generative frameworks, for instance, have taken a position where universals in syntax are usually held up as evidence for Universal Grammar, and where typology is often meant as a research method pursuing one

⁶ Developed at the Universität Konstanz by F. Plank and his co-workers (<http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro/>).

of the same goals as generative grammar: to contribute to a universal theory of grammar by determining the limits of possible human languages (Newmeyer 2005).

Considering cross-linguistic diversity and variation, however, functionalists take essentially the opposite stance: “[t]ypological theory is almost entirely unconcerned with distinguishing possible from impossible languages” (Nichols 2007: 232). And what’s more, “typological theories are about probabilities of distributions, not about possibilities, and so they go far beyond the UG goal of defining what is possible” (Bickel 2007: 241).

As in phonology and morphology, distributions of syntactic patterns frequently reveal the effects of pervasive asymmetries. This subject is specifically examined in **Cinque’s** article that, from a methodological point of view, is a nice counterpart to Croft, since it argues not only for a formal approach to language universals, but also for the integration of typology and formal theory.

The author takes an incredibly rich amount of data from typological research in order to illustrate and explain the incidence of left-right asymmetries between functional modifiers and heads. Among the various left-right asymmetries of natural languages that have been repeatedly observed and discussed in the literature, the asymmetry at stake was already implicit in Greenberg’s Universal 20, and is clearly instantiated by a number of different patterns in dozens of languages. The paper lucidly demonstrates that asymmetries cannot be handled in terms of consistent ordering of heads and dependents, but they can be derived by making assumptions about a single underlying word order and highly constrained possibilities for movement of elements within Kayne’s Antisymmetry framework.

The role of heads in word order correlations was also discussed in Dryer’s explanation for some Greenbergian universals in terms of branching versus non-branching structures (Dryer 1992). In his contribution for this volume, **Dryer** proposes a refreshing and thought-provoking revision of the Branching Direction Theory. The discussion is honestly set out in light of recent work suggesting that many of these branchings, interpreted under the assumption of a flat phrase structure, are questionable. In some cases, the author shows that alternative explanations are available, such as processing constraints or the diachronic processes that gave rise to the constructions. Yet other examples, like auxiliary verb and main verb, do not seem explainable in this way and remain problematic: for these cases the need for further investigation is clearly admitted.

Despite claims that the Greenbergian approach and the Chomskyan approach to linguistic universals are diametrically opposed to each other in every respect, both are in fact examining the same phenomena, and these articles clearly suggest that sharing results in respective fields encourages the reflection on the methods and their refinement.

6 Universals and Semantics

Looking at semantic typology, Mairal and Gil say that “[i]n contrast to phonological and syntactic universals, very little attention has been paid to the study of semantic universals” (Mairal and Gil 2006: ix).

Actually, according to the most radical claim about linguistic relativity, the search of semantic universals may be doomed to failure; but this claim does not appear to be correct to a degree that would make cross-linguistic semantics impossible. And in point of fact, although differing in the degree to which semantic aspects of grammatical phenomena are foregrounded or backgrounded, most studies in grammatical typology do imply some kind of semantic orientation. Therefore, semantic typology considerably overlaps with lexical typology, here meant in its broadest sense, that is as concerned with typologically relevant patterns of the lexicon-grammar interaction (Koptjevskaja-Tamm et al. 2007: 160),

A number of studies and projects has effectively contributed to this search.⁷ Apart from the proposals about universal inventories of lexical items, from Swadesh lists to the ‘semantic primes’ enumerated within the framework of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994, Goddard 2001),⁸ most of the 142 semantic universals in Plank’s Universals Archive also describe interesting constraints on the lexicon. Moreover, systematic cross-linguistic research on semantic categorization has recently explored diverse conceptual domains typically encoded by words, such as *color*, *body*, *kinship*, *perception*, *motion*, *events of breaking and cutting*, *dimension*.

The study of categorization within lexical fields or conceptual domains is obviously confronted with diverse focal question, including polysemy, which is also relevant to cross-linguistic comparison of grammatical forms.

In this respect, just to mention a few choices, implicational scales and the method of semantic maps (Haspelmath 2003), which visually represent cross-linguistic regularity in semantic structure, have enjoyed increased popularity as empirically testable and reliable tools for expressing similarities of categories across languages.

The search for typologically significant correlations between lexicon and grammar also involves the problem of cross-linguistic variation in word classes,⁹ whose behavior and classification can be better understood by taking into account lexical semantics and more fine-grained lexical distinctions (e.g. Dixon and Aikhenvald 2004).

And lexicon-grammar interaction constantly provides novel challenges for future lexical-typological research in formal semantics too, which is primarily concerned with compositionality, i.e. how the meaning of a complex expression can be derived from the meanings of its parts. Interestingly, Talmy (2007) develops a well-

⁷ For the literature, which is too extensive to be listed here, see Koptjevskaja-Tamm et al. (2007) and von Stechow and Matthewson (2007).

⁸ The former ones obviously proposed not as claims for universal lexical status, but as tools for large-scale lexico-statistical and glotto-chronological investigations. The latter ones variously disputed even among the individual contributors to Goddard and Wierzbicka (1994).

⁹ Semantic characterizations and classifications of the speech parts seem hardly survive close scrutiny (e.g. Croft’s discussion on Baker (2003)), and more able to predict only general cross-linguistic tendencies, but a proposal concerning the use of universal exemplars (basic words like the equivalents of *person*, *thing* for nouns, or *do*, *happen* for verbs) is to be found in Wierzbicka et al. (2000).

articulated proposal that cuts across the divide between functionalists and formalists by integrating work on semantic decomposition and cross-linguistic comparison in verbal semantics.¹⁰

A comparable attitude can be found in the article of **Delfitto**, which contains many interesting points in the proposed discussions on determiners, on the lexical operations explaining the causative/unaccusative alternations, and on the *Aktionsart* distinctions. The author argues that a lexicon involves a selection of proper subparts of conceptual structure and originates two distinct forms of linguistic computation: a lexical computation and a syntactic computation. Thus, the first form of semantic computation is pre-syntactic, whereas the second one is post-syntactic. Accordingly, different semantic universals can be identified in each of these two distinct domains.

7 Universals and Diachrony

The diachronic typological approach to language universals is an essential facet of many of the functionally inclined typologists, and this goes back at least to Greenberg's (1965, 1978) early calls for diachrony in typology, and to Givón's (1979) strong argumentation in this direction.

For modern typology, understanding distributions of linguistic types and patterns as historically grown implies that current synchronic distributions are seen as the product of history and diachronic processes.

As a matter of fact, typology is in itself an *explanandum* rather than an *explanans*, and in this respect "there is no need to choose between synchronic and diachronic accounts: synchrony is what diachrony explains" (Moravcsik 2007: 39). Yet, probabilities of change and the principles behind them are a matter of ongoing debate. Broadly speaking, it is possible to identify two basic approaches to these issues, namely whether universal tendencies and geographical clusterings result from overall principles that govern the evolutionary trends, or from locally motivated diachronic paths, as assumed by much work within the framework of grammaticalization theory.¹¹

Under both views, type transitions and type modifying language internal developments are privileged objects of inquiry, which also may cast some light on the relation between linguistic reconstruction and typology (Fisiak 1997), in a domain where linguistic comparison goes back to its roots.

¹⁰ As an example, van Valin (2006: 177) claims that the *Aktionsart* distinctions derived from Vendlerian verb classes "are among the most important organizing principles of verbal systems in human languages". But this insight, formulated solely on data from English, has been falsified by Tatevosov's (2002) comparative study. What is truly universal within actionality may not be the classes themselves, but rather the smaller building blocks from which event structures are composed and which all languages make use of in constructing their *Aktionsart* distinctions (von Stechow and Matthewson 2007).

¹¹ In the enormous amount of literature on this subject, Bybee's research in particular has been widely admired (e.g. Bybee et al. 1988, 1994, and 2003).

As it is well known, the earliest documents in Indo-European languages attest to a typological stage where syntactic relations are marked in the extremely complex morphology of nominal and verbal paradigms, with attendant great freedom in word order. The subsequent typological shift results in the appearance of the so-called configurational type, where the complex morphological paradigms are strongly reduced and the word order is not free.

The long-term evolutionary processes of word order in Latin are specifically investigated by **Magni**, whose article focuses on the gradual construction-by-construction reorientation of constituent order as reflected in coexisting patterns such as adpositions, coordinative, adjectival, genitival and comparative constructions. The author shows that many of the more far-reaching claims regarding consistency of word order type and diachronic change simply do not hold up to closer scrutiny. Ample evidence taken from documents ranging from early to classical Latin, and also comparison with Italic Languages and other Indo-European languages prove that the key features of Latin word order are more amenable to approaches like information structure.

8 Universals and Second Language Acquisition

The diachronic dimension in the study of human language also involves the peculiar developments whereby learner varieties are gradually built up through the various transitional stages of the interlanguages.

Not surprisingly, Greenberg himself proposed some important remarks concerning the relation between typology/universals and research on second language acquisition, explicitly claiming that: “universals apply equally to interlanguage and to primary language” (Greenberg 1991: 39).

In consonance with this, the congress held in Bologna also included the contribution of a leading scholar in both typological and SLA research: in her article **Giacalone** follows up on Greenberg’s suggestions, especially focusing on the domain of morphology and paying particular attention to the complex area of tense/aspect/*Aktionsart*. In her discussion, the author makes use of the ample database available on the acquisition of Italian as a second language, and clearly points out to the advances in the fruitful interaction of typology and SLA studies, where more recent research programs have clearly demonstrated that L2 materials and data can not only contribute to explain how people acquire languages, but also to our understanding of how the human linguistic capacity is structured and functions. Such studies can provide useful insights and help to clarify theoretical issues, thus effectively contributing to research into universals of language.

9 Conclusions

Four decades of research have provided a more accurate body of knowledge about typologically relevant patterns, more reliable tools for their analysis, and substantial

advances in our understanding of universal tendencies and principles across the languages of the world. Major breakthroughs have taken place in both theoretical and empirical issues, with contributions by a number of linguists both working within the functional-typological framework and adhering to generative-formal positions.

The papers that make up this volume compare these different, but not irreconcilable, approaches to explaining linguistic universals, with a focus on up-to-date research dealing mainly with synchronic, but also diachronic data, and covering various areas of linguistics, as well as a wide range of languages.

In the overall picture emerging from these contributions, current research on language universals shows an almost baroque fascination with both the ever-attracting macrocosms of large-scale architectures, and the kaleidoscopic microcosms of fine-grained features and details. And both perspectives point to exciting areas for future research.

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