LANGUAGE TYPOLOGY AND DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS

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UAM 2019/2020

BEFORE WE START

Be aware that this class is designed for MA students!

ERASMUS students who are studying on a BA level must be individually accepted by the teacher.

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FIRST LECTURE, 7 OCTOBER 2019

❖ What is language typology?

❖ What is its relationship to descriptive linguistics?

❖ What will you learn in this class?

THREE MEANINGS OF «TYPOLOGY» (CROFT 2003)

1) Typology = classification: «The most unassuming linguistic definition of typology refers to a classification of structural types across languages.»

2) Typological generalization: «the study of patterns that occur systematically across languages»; goal: finding language universals

3) Typology as an approach in linguistics: functional-typological approach

«The three linguistic definitions of typology correspond to the three stages of any empirical scientific analysis. Typological classification represents the observation of an empirical phenomenon (language) and classification of what we observe. Typological generalization – language universals – is the formation of generalizations over our observations. And the functional-typological approach constructs explanations of the generalizations over what we have observed. In this sense, typology represents an **empirical scientific approach** to the study of language.»

(Croft 2003)

WHAT IS THE KEYWORD FOR EACH OF THE THREE STAGES?

TWO MORE DEFINITIONS

«Linguistic typology can be defined as the systematic study of crosslinguistic variation». (Comrie 2001)

«Modern typology is a discipline that develops variables for capturing crosslinguistic similarities and differences (qualitative typology), explores universal and local skewings in the distribution of these variables (quantitative typology) and proposes theories that explain the skewings (theoretical typology).» (Bickel 2007)

GEORG VON DER GABELENTZ (1840-1893) INTRODUCES THE TERM «TYPOLOGY»

Book «Die Sprachwissenschaft», second edition 1901

«Aber welcher Gewinn wäre es auch, wenn wir einer Sprache auf den Kopf zusagen dürften: Du hast das und das Einzelmerkmal, folglich hast du die und die weiteren Eigenschaften und den und den Gesamtcharakter! - wenn wir, wie es kühne Botaniker wohl versucht haben, aus dem Lindenblatte den Lindenbaum konstruieren könnten. Dürfte man ein ungeborenes Kind taufen, ich würde den Namen *Typologie* wählen. Hier sehe ich der allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft eine Aufgabe gestellt, an deren Lösung sie sich mit ihren heutigen Mitteln wagen darf.»

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

«But what an achievement would it be were we able to confront a language and say to it: 'you have such and such a specific property and hence also such and such further properties and such and such overall character' – were we able, as daring botanists have indeed tried, to construct the entire lime tree from its leaf. If one had to baptize a not yet born child, I would choose the name *typology*. I see here a task for general linguistics, whose solution can already be tempted with the means we have now at our disposal.»

CLASSIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF LANGUAGES

What are different ways to classify languages?

What kinds of characteristics are used in short profiles of languages?

How would you continue the sentence: «Polish is …»?

Read how Somali is profiled in Wikipedia (next slide) and distinguish different types of characteristics, different ways of classfiying and describing a language.

Somali /səˈmɑːli, soʊ-/[4][5] (*Af-Soomaali* [æ̀f sɔːmɑ́ːlì])[6] is an Afroasiatic language belonging to the Cushitic branch. It is spoken as a mother tongue by Somalis in Greater Somalia and the Somali diaspora. Somali is an official language of Somalia,[7] a national language in Djibouti, and a working language in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. It is used as an adoptive language by a few neighboring ethnic minority groups and individuals. The Somali language is written officially with the Latin alphabet.

Somali	
Af Soomaali[1]	
Region	Horn of Africa
Ethnicity	Somalis
Native speakers	16 million (2015)[2]

Language family	Afro-Asiatic
	• Cushitic
	  • Lowland East Cushitic
	    • Somali languages
	      • **Somali**

Writing system	Somali Latin alphabet (Latin script; official) Wadaad writing (Arabic script) Osmanya alphabet Borama alphabet Kaddare alphabet
Official status	
Official language in	⭐ Somalia *Somaliland* Djibouti
Recognised minority language in	Ethiopia Kenya

CRITERIA AND TYPES OF CLASSIFICATION

Genetic classification: a Cushitic language, an Afroasiatic language

Geographic classification: a language of Africa, of East Africa, of the Horn of Africa

Sociolinguistic classification: an official language, a minority language; a language spoken by 16 million speakers (a «big» language?)

Other classification: a language written with the Latin alphabet

Which classifications assign a language to only one class, which classifications allow the possibility of belonging to more than one class?

TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION: STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

From Wikipedia

Somali is an agglutinative language, and also shows properties of inflection.

Somali is a subject–object–verb (SOV) language. It is largely head final, with postpositions and with obliques preceding verbs. However, Somali noun phrases are head-initial.

Somali marks clusivity in the first person plural pronouns

Nouns form their plural in three ways, including reduplication.

GOALS OF THIS CLASS

1) Understand structural properties of languages (such as «agglutinative», «head-final», «reduplication»), know the relevant terminology and be able to describe the structural properties of a language well known (students' first language and languages studied);

2) Know about the diversity of the world's languages according to structural properties, know about correlations between structural features and generalizations that can be drawn;

3) Be able to find out more about these topics in the research literature;

4) Know about methods used in linguistic typology and be able to design a typological study.

THREE QUESTIONS ASKED AND ANSWERED THROUGHOUT THIS CLASS

1. How can languages be described in a way that makes them comparable? How can languages be compared?

2. How do typologists get their data?

3. How are the results of typological research displayed?

IF ALL THIS IS NEW TO YOU…

Recommended reading on a basic level (undergraduate)

Nau, Nicole. [2014]. Chapter 2. Exploring linguistic diversity. *languagesindanger.eu Book of Knowledge*. Online publication. http://languagesindanger.eu/book-of-knowledge/exploring-linguistic-diversity/

Nau, Nicole. [2014]. Chapter 3. Language structures. *languagesindanger.eu Book of Knowledge*. Online publication. http://languagesindanger.eu/book-of-knowledge/language-structures/

Obligatory and recommended reading for all will be given each class.

HOW TO SHOW THE RESULTS OF TYPOLOGICAL RESEARCH: 1) COUNTING AND MAPS

WALS World Atlas of Linguistic Structures, online at wals.info

Example:

Chapter 39: Inclusive/Exclusive distinction in pronouns

https://wals.info/chapter/39

Value	Representation
○ No grammaticalised marking at all	2
○ 'We' and 'I' identical	10
● No inclusive/exclusive opposition	120
● Only inclusive differentiated	5
● Inclusive and exclusive differentiated	63
Total:	200
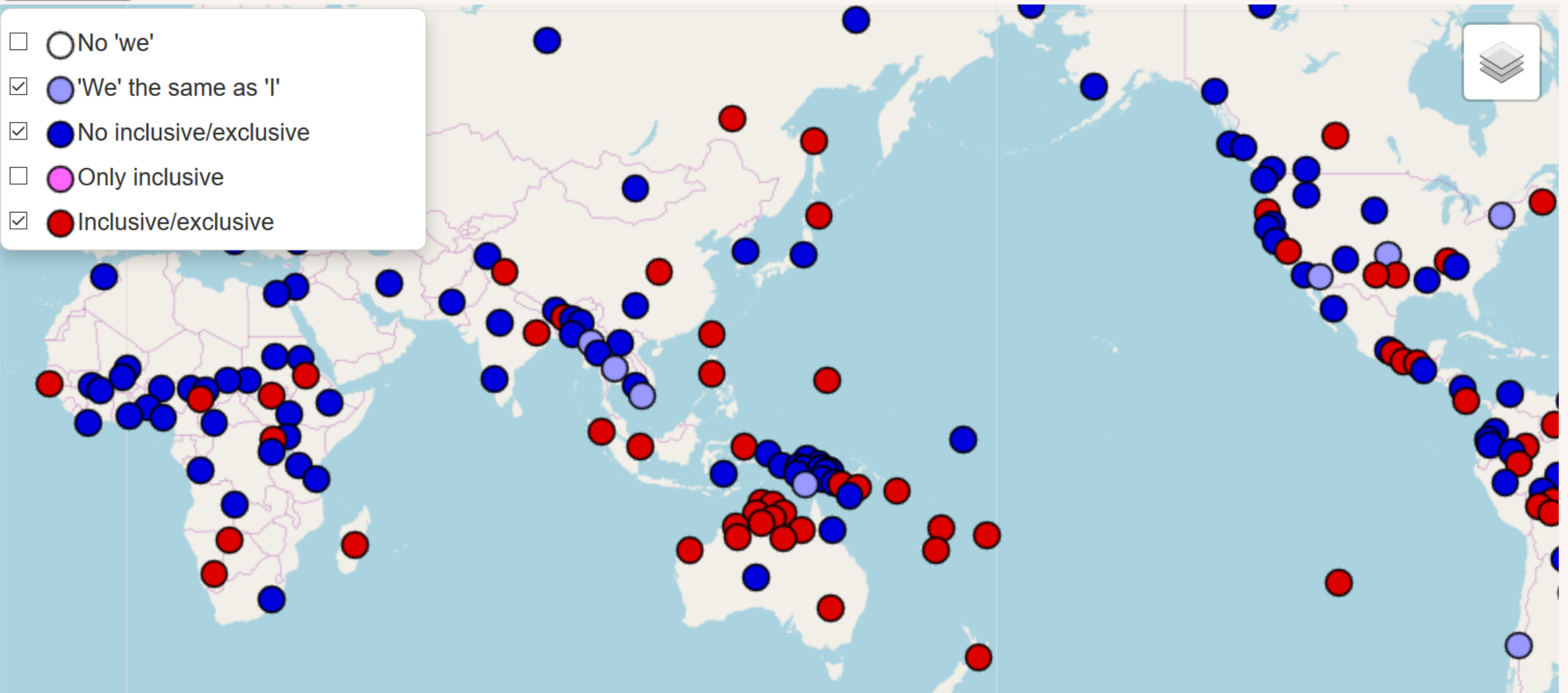
ANOTHER EXAMPLE: POLAR QUESTIONS (YES/NO QUESTIONS)

Which different ways of forming a polar question do you know? For example, in Polish, German, French, Arabic…

What do you think – which technique is most wide-spread in the languages of the world?

WALS, CHAPTER 116

	Value	Representation
🔵	Question particle	585
🔴	Interrogative verb morphology	164
🟣	Question particle and interrogative verb morphology	15
🟡	Interrogative word order	13
🔶	Absence of declarative morphemes	4
⚪	Interrogative intonation only	173
⚪	No interrogative-declarative distinction	1
	Total:	955
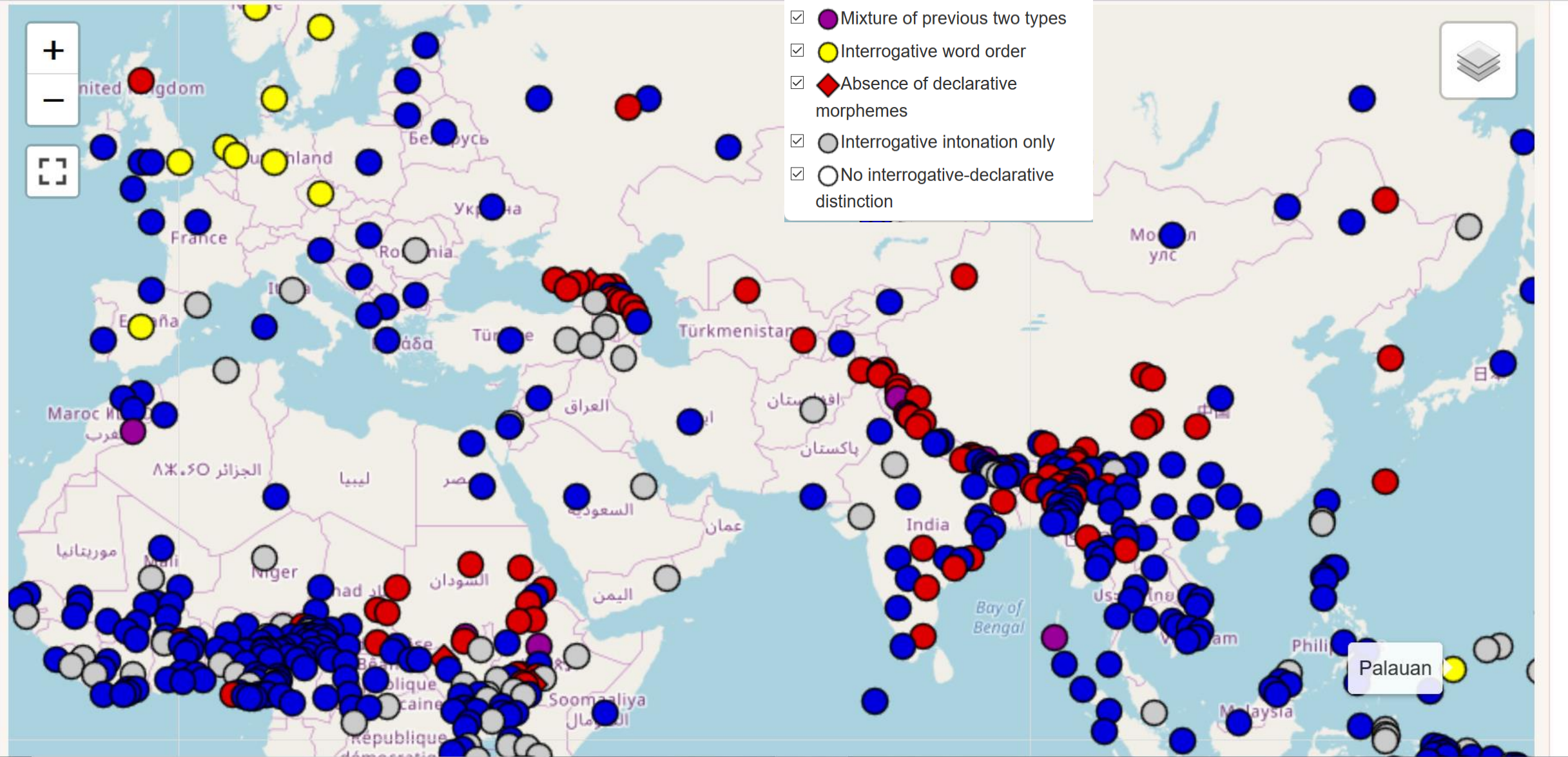
HOMEWORK: A. READ!

Obligatory reading

1. Croft 2003, 1-2 (optional: more of the chapter)

2. Payne 2006, 189-190 (What is typology?)

➢ compare Croft and Payne: do they say the same? What do they say?

➢ answer the question on Croft on the next slide

3. Payne 2006, 190-193 (Morphological typology – will be discussed next week; Syntactic typology – will be discussed in detail in two weeks)

HOMEWORK: B. THINK!

«An example of an implicational universal is the generalization, 'if the demonstrative follows the head noun, then the relative clause also follows the head noun.'» (Croft 2003, 1)

Take Polish or another language you know: does it comply with this generalization?

Construct two sentences that show that your language is (or is not) in accordance with this universal.

HOMEWORK C. EXPLORE!

Browse the WALS (wals.info) and find answers to the following questions:

❖ Which are the two most common orders of subject, verb and object? Which are the least common?

❖ On which continent do we not find indigenous languages with tone systems?

❖ Which languages do not have any of the sounds [p b w]?

❖ Which type is more represented: languages that have an indefinite article but no definite article, or languages that have a definite article but no indefinite article?

Formulate your own questions and find the answer!

REFERENCES

Bickel, Balthasar. 2007. Typology in the 21st century: major current developments. *Linguistic Typology*,11, 239-251.

Comrie, Bernard. 2001. Different views of language typology. In M. Haspelmath, ed., *Language Typology and Language Universals: An International Handbook, Band 1*, 24-39. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Croft, William 1990, 2003. *Typology and Universals*. Cambridge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Second edition 2003]

Payne, Thomas E. 2006. *Exploring language structure: A student's guide*. New York: Cambridge University Press.