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Book Review

An Introduction to Linguistic Typology, Viveka Velupillai, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 2012, xxi + 517 pp., ISBN: 9789027211989

An introduction to linguistic typology introduces beginning students to recent findings and developments in the field of linguistic typology. As such, it stands in the line of textbooks that were published one or more decades ago, such as Comrie (1989), Whaley (1997), Song (2001) and Croft (2003), as well as a recent one, Moravcsik (2013). The intended audience consists of readers with a basic and general linguistic background, who ''have at the minimum done introductory courses in general linguistics and phonetics/phonology, but have never heard of typology before.'' (pp. 3–4). Target readers will thus typically be linguistics students in the second semester of their first year or beyond. I used the book as textbook in a Typology class taught to a group of ~25 second year students of Linguistics at Leiden University in 2013 and 2014. This review reflects my experiences and incorporates some of the comments made by the students.

According to the author (p. 4) the aim of the book is ''to provide an overview of the various kinds of linguistic features that have hitherto received attention in the study of linguistic typology.'' In this, it is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather ''should be seen as a smorgasbord of the multifaceted nature of linguistic typology and the richness of linguistic systems as we know them, which will hopefully whet the appetite enough to spur the reader into further investigation.''

There are many good points about this textbook. First, it presents and discusses data from over 500 languages or language varieties. (To compare: Moravcsik, 2013 features some 170 languages, Whaley (1997) some 150, and Comrie (1989) less than a hundred). It includes information on the affiliation and geographical location of each of these varieties: every chapter starts with a map indicating the geographical location of the languages discussed in the chapter, and Appendix 2 lists all of them with their ISO code, affiliation, location and number of speakers. This is a very useful plus: from now on, no-one can be excused not to know in which part of the world languages such as Krongo, Qiang, Mocoví or Kata Kolok are spoken.

Many examples cited in the book come from languages that have never before featured in textbooks. This is refreshing, and it enables students to experience the excitement that comes with new discoveries. They see intriguing and sometimes rare language patterns – every week throughout an entire semester. Some students explicitly mentioned how this broadened their view on what to expect out there; others said it allowed them put the grammar of the languages they were taught about in school in a more global perspective. For instance, if you are taught since the age of 10 that the passive is a fundamental strategy to highlight one participant and downplay the other, you may be surprised to learn that this structure is lacking in most of the languages of the world (p. 266; citing Siewierska's chapter on passives in the *World Atlas of Language Structures* (WALS, http://wals.info)). It may then be even more surprising to read that there are languages with a construction that is basically the mirror image of the passive, the antipassive (p. 267). And how many linguists are aware that a strategy where a relative clause is formed by using a relative pronoun (*the man* [*who waved at us*]) is actually very rare in the world's languages (perhaps only attested in Indo-European), while a gapping strategy (*the man that* [-- *waved at us*] is extremely common? (pp. 325–326, citing Comrie and Kuteva's chapter in the WALS).

The second asset of this book is that it incorporates findings from the large databases on language structures that have become available during the last decade: the (WALS) and *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures* (ApiCS, http://apics-online.info). By constantly referring to these databases, observations on cross-linguistically frequent or rare patters are put on a firmer empirical basis than they may have been in other textbooks. And citing these online sources increases the student's involvement in the empirical side of doing typology: it invites students to double-check findings, go back to the primary sources cited online, and so on.

The third good thing about this book is that it includes information on sign languages. As languages that form their own ''type'' by virtue of the difference in modality (using visual–gestural communication instead of audio-oral communication), it is important that students of typology know about recent findings in the field of sign language structure: does difference in modality influence language structure, and if so how?

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Where earlier textbooks mostly focused on morpho-syntax, this book takes a more comprehensive approach: all domains of language, from phonetics to pragmatics, are considered to be relevant for typological study. This is reflected in the structure of the book. Chapters 4–12 (the central body of the book) discuss typological structures from the bottom up. It starts with the smallest meaningful units, sounds (ch. 4: Phonology), then morphemes are presented (ch. 5: Morphology), followed by the formation and classification of words (ch. 6: The lexicon and its classes), the combination of words into nominal and verbal phrases (ch. 7: Nominal categories and syntax, ch. 8: Verbal categories), how arguments and predicates combine into clauses (ch. 9: Simple clauses), the linear arrangement of elements that make up phrases and clauses (ch. 10: Word order), the various ways in which clauses can be combined (ch. 11: Complex clauses), ending with a chapter on how speech acts and politeness are formally reflected in language (ch. 12: Speech acts and politeness). (It remains unclear where ch. 13 'Language change' fits into this model, and why it should be part of an introduction to typology.)

The book has a transparent textbook organization: keywords are bolded in the text, and a summary, list of key words, and a set of 5 exercises are provided at the end of each chapter. There are two appendixes: one is a useful list of on languages that are cited in the book with their genealogical and geographical information as well as speaker numbers. The other is a sample of some 30 websites used by typologists. The list is useful by including sites of various types of online databases on languages or language data that are often used by typologists (e.g. the *Ethnologue*, the online databases of the *Surrey Morphology Group*, or the *Corpus Nederlandse Gebarentaal* (NGT)). However, the list appears to be somewhat eclectic. For instance, why include organizations like *Living Tongues* (http://www.livingtongues.org/) but not other organizations operating in the same field (e.g. *Documentation of endangered languages – DOBES* (http://dobes.mpi.nl/)?

There are a few aspects where the book is somewhat weak. Perhaps the most disappointing is that the issue *why* certain patterns are cross-linguistically rare or frequent remains behind the horizon throughout the entire book. To be sure, the author describes linguistic typology as ''the study *and interpretation* of linguistic or language types'' (p. 15), and notes that its ''driving force is to try to establish recurring patterns across languages, in order to answer the questions ''what is out there?'', ''where does it occur?'', and ''*why* do we have particular patterns?'' (p. 15). In other words, ''Linguistic typology is basically about tendencies and by extension trying to explain *why* we get these tendencies.'' (p. 19) [italics by MK]. Thus, the reader expects discussion of this issue in the book. However, ch. 2 ('Typology and universals') ends with a section entitled ''A very short note on motivations for language universals'', which starts out by saying ''It is beyond the scope of this book to provide a discussion on the motivations for the various cross-linguistic patterns we see, something which could in itself fill several volumes.'' (p. 34). What follows is a single page explaining that explanations for universals can be language internal (e.g. due to iconicity and markedness) or language external (e.g. because of principles of economy, or processing constraints), and provides references to some seminal works on these issues. While it is true that there are limits to the size of a textbook, for a book with over 350 pages of text devoted to describing structures in some 500 languages to have just *one* page explicitly devoted to explaining the patterns we see, is truly disappointing. After all, isn't the aim of a typology class not just to teach students how to recognize patterns and make classifications, but also to challenge them to think about the ''why?'' question? Indeed, many pages of this book bring students right to the point where they ask ''why would this be so?'', but then quickly move on to the next topic or structure. This is a missed opportunity.

Another weaker point about the book is that the background knowledge that the reader-students are assumed to have varies quite significantly per chapter. On the one hand, many second year students will find the level of background knowledge assumed for chapter 4 (Phonology) or 10 (Word order) to be (''insultingly'') low. On the other hand, parts of other chapters are hard to follow without having quite advanced background knowledge. One example: the morphological typology presented in section 5.2 (in chapter 5 'Morphology') mainly draws on Bickel and Nichols, 2007 and their work in the WALS, and distinguishes language types according to their 'Exponence', 'Fusion', or 'Flexivity'. The section presupposes knowledge about a specific morphological model, but fails to explain why this particular morphological typology was chosen in the first place: is it the most useful to apply when doing morphological typology? Does it incorporate certain empirical findings in the most satisfying way? Does it make interesting cross-linguistic predictions?

A third aspect that could be improved is the amount and type of exercises provided. The 5 exercises provided with each chapter mostly recapitulate notions or issues described in the chapter, and thus function as a kind of blanks exercise. There are many questions asking 'how', or 'what'; no question asks 'why'. Overall, the exercises do not help the students to reflect critically on the text or investigate linguistic data. Few students in my class bothered to make the exercises; they did not find them interesting or challenging enough. I think that a second edition of the book would benefit greatly from including more exercises per chapter – even if this would have to come at the expense of some pages of text. Additional exercises that might be useful for each chapter might include the following types: an exercise where students are asked to do further analysis of a dataset mentioned in the text; an exercise involving additional language comparisons using data from WALS or ApiCS; an assignment involving a critical study of the sources underlying an empirical claim made in the chapter; or an assignment where the student must explain a rare (or frequent) pattern discussed in the chapter. Pending a second edition, the lack of adequate exercises/assignments can be solved by the instructor of the class: we can create

assignments ourselves, or recruit our students to do so. I did the latter. At the beginning of the course each chapter was assigned to a group of 2–3 students. Each group was requested to distribute 4 assignments about ''their'' chapter one week before that chapter was due to be discussed in class. Their classmates had to answer them in writing and hand them in. The group that made the exercises got a mark for the quality of their assignments, and the other students got marks for how they answered them. Both the assignments and the answers were discussed in class. In this way, it was possible to encourage the students to interact with the text in a more active and critical way, and to formulate their own questions about the text and the data presented.

A fourth point of criticism is about the quality of the maps and the graphic illustrations. Many chapters contain at least one map where a certain typological feature is displayed on a global map. When a map displays a single feature with just black dots (e.g. Map 6.1, languages with noun incorporation) it is clearly legible, and very useful! However, many of the maps in the book have two or more features displayed, and many represent a great number of languages. Such maps quickly become illegible because the white dots, squares or triangles are virtually invisible. Also, as all the feature world maps are printed in the same tiny size, irrespective of the number of features and languages represented on them, some maps are totally unreadable. For instance, Map 8.1 (p. 198) displays some 200 languages and the tense values <no tense>, <past/non-past>, <future/non-future>, <past/present/future> in shapes and shades of white, grey, black – and all of this on one third of a book page, in faint grey print. In a second edition of the book, the feature maps should either be printed well, and in an appropriate size, or not be included at all.

In the sections on sign languages, signs are represented by graphic illustrations. These are often hard to read for lay-persons who are not used to seeing sign languages in print (i.e., most students and instructors of a typology class). The difficulty is partly because most signs involve three dimensions, and hand movement is often an integral part of a sign. It may be useful to illustrate the signs in the book with e.g. clips on YouTube, so that students can actually watch how the signs ''sound''.

In conclusion: while it has its weak spots (some of which may be repaired with relative ease in a second edition), *An introduction to linguistic typology* provides a fresh and clear overview of a vast number of linguistic structures in the languages of the world, many of which have not featured in textbooks before.

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Marian Klamer
Leiden University, The Netherlands
E-mail address: M.A.F.Klamer@hum.leidenuniv.nl