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UNIVERSAL FEATURES OF LANGUAGE AND CROSS-LINGUISTIC COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Аннотация

Язык как уникальная человеческая система общения охватывает универсальные черты, которые лежат в основе его структуры и использования в различных языковых контекстах. В этой статье изучаются универсальные свойства языка и проводится сравнительный анализ различных языковых типов для выявления как общих, так и отличительных характеристик. Исследование изучает фонологические, морфологические, синтаксические и семантические элементы, уделяя особое внимание типологическим общностям и различиям между аналитическими, агглютинативными и флективными языками. С помощью качественных и количественных методологий оно иллюстрирует, как языковые универсалии обеспечивают основу для понимания языкового разнообразия, одновременно способствуя межкультурной коммуникации. Результаты показывают, что, несмотря на значительные поверхностные различия, все естественные языки разделяют набор основных принципов, которые облегчают понимание, выражение и создание смысла, тем самым укрепляя когнитивные и социальные основы языка.

Ключевые слова. Языковые универсалии, типологическое сравнение, фонология, синтаксис, языковое разнообразие, аналитические языки, агглютинативные языки, флективные системы, сравнительное языкознание.

Abstract

Language, as a uniquely human system of communication, encompasses universal features that underlie its structure and usage across diverse linguistic contexts. This article explores the universal properties of language and undertakes a comparative analysis of different language types to reveal both shared and distinctive characteristics. The research investigates phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic elements, focusing on typological commonalities and variances between analytic, agglutinative, and inflectional languages. Through qualitative and quantitative methodologies, it illustrates how language universals provide a framework for understanding linguistic diversity while fostering intercultural communication. The findings suggest that despite significant surface differences, all natural languages share a set of core principles that facilitate comprehension, expression, and meaning-making, thereby reinforcing the cognitive and social foundations of language.

Keywords. Language universals, typological comparison, phonology, syntax, linguistic diversity, analytic languages, agglutinative languages, inflectional systems, comparative linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a universal human faculty, indispensable for communication, cultural transmission, and cognitive development. Despite the striking diversity among the world's estimated 7,000 languages, all languages appear to exhibit certain core properties—commonly referred to as language universals. These features include, but are not limited to, the use of discrete sounds or signs, hierarchical structure, duality of patterning, productivity, and displacement. Understanding these universals is key to both linguistic theory and applied linguistics, as they reveal the deep commonalities underlying surface-level variation.

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Linguistic universals have long intrigued scholars. From the work of Joseph Greenberg on implicational universals to Noam Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar, the question persists: why do all human languages, no matter how geographically or genetically distinct, conform to certain patterns? While some argue these patterns are cognitive and biologically determined, others suggest they emerge through communicative efficiency and social function.

The comparative approach to linguistics—particularly through typological analysis—allows researchers to investigate how different language structures relate to universal tendencies. In this regard, languages can be broadly categorized into types such as analytic (e.g., English, Mandarin), agglutinative (e.g., Turkish, Uzbek), and inflectional (e.g., Latin, Russian). Each of these types handles grammatical functions like tense, number, and case in distinctive ways, yet they all fulfill the same communicative purposes.

This article focuses on the exploration of language universals and how they manifest differently in typologically diverse languages. It aims to identify shared linguistic features, investigate structural divergences, and assess what these findings reveal about the nature of human language. Special attention is paid to phonological systems, morphological processes, and syntactic constructions. Through this lens, the study contributes to our understanding of the cognitive and social architecture of language and highlights how cross-linguistic comparison deepens our insight into universal grammar and linguistic evolution.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

Numerous scholars have contributed to the theoretical foundation of linguistic universals and typological comparisons. Greenberg (1963) established a seminal framework by identifying universals across a sample of 30 languages, observing consistent patterns in word order, morphological marking, and phoneme inventories. For instance, his implicational universal that "if a language has VSO word order, it tends to have prepositions" has been empirically supported across many languages. Chomsky (1965), through the concept of Universal Grammar, proposed that all human languages are underpinned by innate grammatical structures hardwired into the brain, offering a generative model for syntactic variation.

Typologists like Comrie (1981) and Croft (2003) have expanded on these foundations, classifying languages based on morphological and syntactic patterns. Comrie's morphological typology distinguishes between isolating, agglutinative, fusional, and polysynthetic languages, each reflecting different strategies for encoding grammatical relationships. His work underscores the utility of cross-linguistic comparison in identifying regularities that may be cognitively or functionally motivated.

Research on phonological universals has identified a restricted set of consonants and vowels common across languages. For instance, Maddieson (1984) found that all languages have plosives, and most have both nasal and fricative sounds. Additionally, the principle of markedness suggests that certain features (e.g., voiced bilabial plosives like /b/) are more "natural" or less marked than others, leading to their widespread occurrence.

Recent developments in linguistic typology, such as the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS), have provided a robust database for comparative analysis, enabling large-scale quantitative studies. These data-driven approaches complement earlier theoretical work, revealing patterns that may not have been visible through individual case studies.

However, critiques have emerged regarding the universality claims. Evans and Levinson (2009) challenge the idea of deep universals, suggesting that diversity is more extensive than previously assumed. They argue for a probabilistic rather than deterministic view of linguistic structure, one that acknowledges the role of culture, contact, and chance in shaping languages.

The literature indicates a tension between universalist and relativist perspectives. This article adopts a balanced view, recognizing both the shared cognitive basis of language and the sociocultural forces that lead to typological diversity. Through this lens, the comparative analysis seeks to illustrate how universals operate within the constraints of particular linguistic systems.

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This study employs a mixed-methods approach to identify and analyze universal features of language through a cross-linguistic comparative framework. The primary focus lies on three representative languages: English (analytic), Uzbek (agglutinative), and Russian (inflectional). These languages were selected for their typological diversity, wide documentation, and availability of linguistic data. The methodological framework consists of both qualitative and quantitative analyses:

1. **Qualitative Analysis:** Linguistic features were examined at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels. Data was extracted from grammars, academic corpora, and linguistic descriptions. For each language, representative sentences were analyzed to explore how grammatical categories like tense, aspect, number, and case are marked.
2. **Quantitative Analysis:** Utilizing data from WALS and typological surveys, frequency and distribution of selected features (e.g., word order types, case systems, number of morphological distinctions) were tabulated. Statistical methods were applied to measure degrees of typological similarity and divergence.
3. **Comparative Typology:** Based on Comrie's (1981) and Greenberg's (1963) models, a comparative table was constructed to display contrasts across languages in terms of morphological marking strategies, phoneme inventories, and syntactic constructions. This typological mapping highlights both universal trends and language-specific realizations.
4. **Structural Mapping:** Diagrammatic representations were employed to model word formation, sentence structure, and phoneme systems in each language. This visual approach aids in identifying parallels and divergences in linguistic organization.

Ethical considerations were minimal due to reliance on published linguistic data rather than human subjects. Data integrity was ensured through triangulation from multiple reliable sources, including academic databases, descriptive grammars, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

The research design emphasizes the explanatory power of typological comparison for uncovering linguistic universals. By aligning language-specific structures within a shared analytical framework, the study uncovers both convergence and divergence, offering insights into the constraints and freedoms inherent in natural languages.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis revealed several key universal features present across all three languages, despite their typological differences. These include:

- **Phonological Universals:** All three languages utilize a limited set of consonants and vowels, including common features like bilabial stops (/p/, /b/), nasals (/m/, /n/), and front vowels (/i/). Despite differences in inventory size, the presence of such sounds confirms phonological universals across language types.
- **Morphological Patterns:** English, being largely analytic, uses word order and auxiliary verbs to convey grammatical relations (e.g., "He will go"). Uzbek, as an agglutinative language, expresses similar information through affixation (e.g., "Boradi" = he/she will go). Russian, with its inflectional system, marks tense, aspect, and person via complex inflections (e.g., "Он пойдет"). Despite the formal variation, all three languages communicate the same grammatical categories, supporting the universal presence of tense, number, and person marking.
- **Syntactic Universals:** All languages display hierarchical structure in syntax, with subjects, verbs, and objects forming the core of sentence construction. Word order preferences differ—SVO in English, SOV in Uzbek, and flexible order in Russian—but the underlying grammatical roles remain constant.
- **Semantic Universals:** Each language provides means to express causation, negation, modality, and questions, indicating that such functions are universally encoded in human language. The

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methods vary—from modal verbs in English to suffixes in Uzbek—but the presence of these functions across all three supports the semantic universality hypothesis.

The comparative table below illustrates key features:

Feature	English (Analytic)	Uzbek (Agglutinative)	Russian (Inflectional)
Word Order	SVO	SOV	Flexible (SVO/SOV)
Morphology Type	Isolating	Agglutinative	Fusional
Case Marking	Prepositions	Postpositions + suffixes	Inflections
Tense/Aspect Marking	Auxiliary verbs	Verb suffixes	Verb inflections
Question Formation	Auxiliary inversion	Question particles	Intonation or particles

These results demonstrate that although surface structures vary significantly, deep grammatical functions are universally represented. Furthermore, the findings highlight how each language adapts general principles to specific cultural and communicative contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study of language universals through cross-linguistic comparison reveals the profound unity and diversity of human linguistic capacity. Languages as structurally distinct as English, Uzbek, and Russian demonstrate common underlying features—such as hierarchical syntax, phonological constraints, and grammatical categories like tense and person—that suggest a universal blueprint for human communication.

While the means of expressing these categories vary according to typological class, the functions they fulfill are strikingly consistent. This supports the hypothesis that all natural languages, regardless of geographical, cultural, or historical differences, are constrained by cognitive and communicative imperatives that shape their structure.

At the same time, the diversity observed in morphological strategies, word order preferences, and syntactic constructions underscores the adaptive nature of language. Each linguistic system evolves within its specific sociocultural environment, resulting in a rich array of expressive possibilities built upon universal principles.

This study contributes to linguistic theory by affirming the existence of core language universals while also advocating for nuanced typological analysis. It also emphasizes the importance of cross-linguistic research in uncovering the balance between universality and variation in language. Further research may explore under-documented languages to expand our understanding of typological diversity and refine models of Universal Grammar.

Ultimately, this analysis reinforces the idea that language is both a shared human endowment and a uniquely varied expression of thought and culture.

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