

TUTORIAL

5.22

Language Types and Variation

This tutorial looks at how different languages can be said to be the same *type* of language because of specific features they share. It will also look at language variation, and why there can be different varieties of the same language.

Language Types

We saw that languages can be related to each other because they belong to the same language family. We also saw that unrelated languages can be similar because they have been in contact with each other. But there is a third kind of relationship languages can have with each other – they can be related in *typology*.

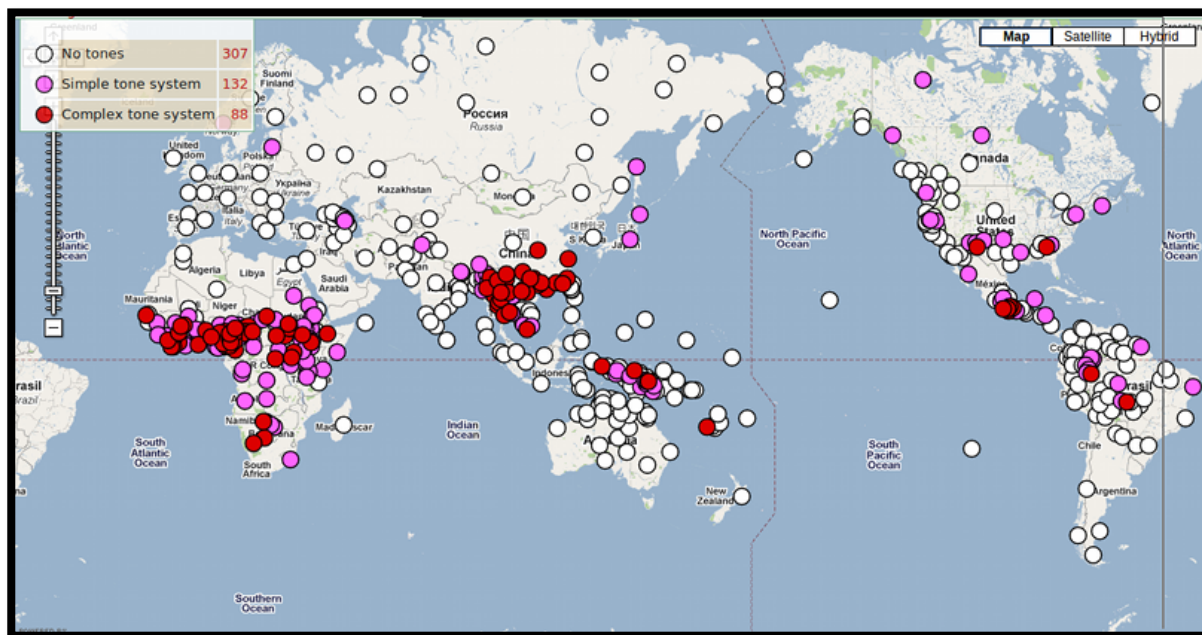
Geographically widely separated languages that are not part of the same language family may still share features. This is due to the fact that there are universal tendencies for languages to have certain combinations of characteristics. For example, there are languages all around the world that have the basic order Verb + Object + Subject (VOS), but this tells us nothing about whether they are in the same language family or geographically close to one another, they simply share that feature.

Just because two languages have similarities does not mean they are related. Many Papuan languages share the clause order Subject + Object + Verb (SOV) with languages of India such as Hindi. Many Austronesian languages share the clause order Subject + Verb + Object (SVO) with English. We will look at some examples of different languages and the major features that unrelated languages can share. These features can be phonological, morphological or are related to the syntax.

Phonology

One difference in the phonology of languages is that some languages use tone and others don't. This means a group of phonemes together might mean one thing if it is said with rising pitch, and something completely different if said with falling pitch, or with level pitch, etc. In tonal languages, the pitch is just as important a part of the meaning of a word as its phonetic sounds.

Sinitic languages like Mandarin have tone, and some unrelated South-east Asian languages like Vietnamese and Thai also have tone. Tone is an areal (geographical) feature for South-east Asian languages. But there are many other languages around the world that are not in the same family or geographically related to Sinitic languages that also have tone. For example, *Yoruba*, a Niger-Congo language of Nigeria, *Gadsup*, a Trans-New Guinea language of Papua New Guinea, and *Koasati*, a Hokan-Siouan language of the USA, all have tone. This map shows the distribution of tonal languages in the world -



Morphology

Languages differ in how complex they are in their morphology. There are four types: isolating, agglutinating, fusional and polysynthetic.

Isolating - Mandarin and Vietnamese are examples of isolating languages.

(1 word = 1 morpheme).

An example in Mandarin:

Wǒ gāng yào gěi nǐ nà yì bēi chá.

I just want for you bring one cup tea

'I am just about to bring you a cup of tea.'

Agglutinating - Yanyuwa and Finnish are agglutinating languages.

(1 word = many morphemes; 1 morpheme = 1 function)

An example from Yanyuwa (Australian Aboriginal):

Kan-alu-arlkarlba-nthaninya.

us-they-wash-past.customary

'They used to wash us.'

Fusional (sometimes called *inflecting*) - Latin and Russian are fusional languages.

(1 word = many morphemes; 1 morpheme = many functions)

An example from Latin:

Regin-a serv-um vid-et.
 queen-FEM.SG.NOM slave-MASC.SG.ACC see-3SGSUBJ.PAST
 'The queen saw the slave.'

Polysynthetic - Tiwi and West Greenlandic are polysynthetic languages.

(1 word = very many morphemes; 1 morpheme = 1 or more functions)

An example from Tiwi (Australian Aboriginal):

A-wunu-wati-yi-ma-jingi-kili-ja.
 he-towards-morning-start-with-in-vehicle-go
 'He is coming along in a vehicle in the morning.'

Syntax

Word order in sentences

Languages can be of the same type because they share the same word order. These are all of the possible basic word orders: SVO VOS OVS SOV VSO OSV. Look at the following examples of different languages which all have different word orders:

English (Subject + Verb + Object):

Tom ate the chicken.
 S V O

Turkish (Subject + Object + Verb):

Hasan küz-ü aldı.
 Hasan ox bought
 S O V
 'Hasan bought the ox.'

Fijian (Verb + Object + Subject):

E ā raici na koli na yalewa.
 see the dog the woman
 V O S
 'The woman saw the dog.'

Kokota (Austronesian, Solomon Islands) (Verb + Subject + Object):

Ne kati-ni ia mheke ia zora.
 bite the dog the pig
 V S O
 'The dog bit the pig.'

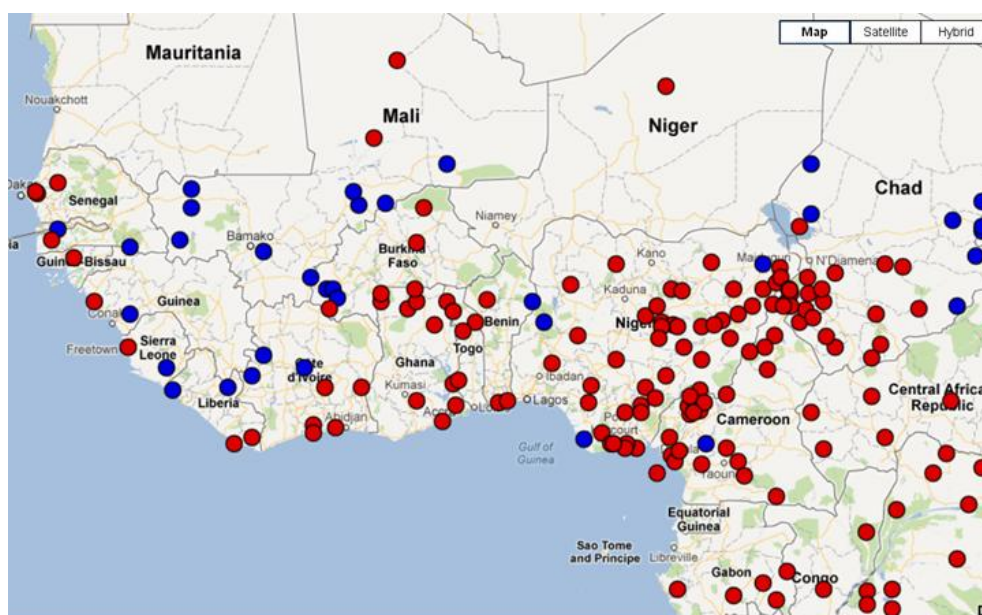
Hixkaryana (Cariban, Brazil) (Object + Verb + Subject):

Toto ya-hos-ye kamara.
 man grabbed jaguar
 O V S
 ‘The jaguar grabbed the man.’

Tobati (Austronesian, West Papua) (Object + Subject + Verb):

Honyo foro rom-i.
 dog pig see
 O S V
 ‘The pig saw the dog.’

Both Verb-Object and Object-Verb languages can be found on every continent and in a number of different language families. If you look at the map below, you will see that in this relatively restricted area - western sub-Saharan Africa - languages of both types are found.



● Verb-Object ● Object-Verb

Left-headed versus right-headed

Some languages place the head of a phrase *before* everything else (at the left edge of the phrase). Others place the head of a phrase *after* everything else (at the right edge).

Japanese is a right-headed language. This means that heads come after their dependents: postpositions come after their noun phrase, nouns come after their adjectives and after their possessors, and verbs come after their objects. The heads are in bold below:

Tokyo **ni**
 Tokyo [locative]
 NP P
'in Tokyo'

ookii **kodomo**
 big child
 ADJ N
'big child'

Taroo no **atama**
 Taroo [genitive] head
 POSSESSOR N
'Taroo's head'

tori o **tabe-ta**
 bird eat-PAST
 OBJ V
'ate the bird'

The Malagasy language (Austronesian, Madagascar) is left-headed. This means that heads come before their dependents: prepositions come before their noun phrase, nouns come before their adjectives and before their possessors, and verbs come before their objects. Heads are in bold below:

alim tana
 inside ground
 P NP
'in the ground'

ny **kiraro** maloto
 the shoes dirty
 N ADJ
'the dirty shoes'

tongotry Rakoto
 foot Rakoto
 N POSSESSOR
'Rakoto's foot'

nividy ny mofa
 PAST.buy the bread
 V OBJ
'bought the bread'

Variation in Language

We have looked at how different languages can share similar features and so be of the same type. Now we are going to look at why one single language can develop different variations. Variation is a central fact of human language – language is never exactly the same as it was before. Even if you recorded yourself saying the same word over and over again and tried to say it exactly the same way, there would still be slight variations each time.

Most variations in pronunciation aren't significant because the brain doesn't recognize them. As long as the pronunciation of a certain sound is within a certain range, it doesn't matter a lot how the sound is produced – the brain will recognize all examples from within the acceptable range as being a particular sound. However, if you intend to make sound A but you actually make a sound within the pronunciation range for sound B, then the brain will notice that there has been a variation.

This is actually what does happen in language over time. So, for example, the sounds [aɪ] and [ɔɪ] are very similar to one another. You can think of them as adjacent units on the continuum of sound. Most of the time, variations in the pronunciation of [aɪ] go unnoticed. But, sometimes, people cross the boundary between the two, and this is noticeable. People do notice when a word like *my* is pronounced as [mɔɪ], or indeed *like* is pronounced as [lɪk].

Over long periods of time, these kinds of changes accumulate and you can get great differences. About 2,000 years ago English and German were one single language, but over time, with the accumulation of various changes, they have become quite different from one another. This same kind of gradual change has happened all over the world. But change doesn't have to produce different languages – it can also produce different *varieties* within a language. There are two main kinds of variation – geographical and social.

Geographical variation is described in terms of the concepts *dialect* and *language*. We looked at what a dialect is in a previous tutorial, but we will do a quick review:

Dialect: Two speech varieties are regarded as dialects of a single language if they are mutually intelligible.

Language: Two speech varieties are regarded as different languages if they aren't mutually intelligible.

Remember that there is an exception to this rule? Two speech varieties which aren't mutually intelligible can still be dialects of an overall language. If there is a chain of mutually intelligible varieties, then they are analyzed as dialects of an overall language.

Geographical (Dialect) differences in Australian English

Geographical variation is not a very noticeable feature of Australian English. This is probably because of the high rates of mobility of the Australian population since the beginning of settlement. Other areas with high population mobility since the beginning of colonization, like western Canada and the western United States also show no immediately noticeable regional variation.

But, even though it isn't very noticeable, there is a regional variation in Australian English. Some people have identified different dialects of Australian English - they are consistently different but mutually intelligible. The table below shows the percentage of people who use a 'short A' rather than a 'long A' sound in the words at the left. You can see that speakers from South Australia have significantly lower frequencies of short A than speakers from elsewhere. Similar patterns are found for other pronunciations and show regional variations.

	Brisbane	Melbourne	Sydney	Hobart	Mt Gambier	Adelaide
dance	100	95	93	89	89	73
advance	94	90	86	86	4	18
plant	97	92	82	82	4	0
grasp	0	3	30	15	2	9
giraffe	0	0	4	19	0	0
mask	3	0	0	0	0	0

Social (Dialect) differences in Australian English

People's social background affects which linguistic variety they use when they speak. Every speaker has an accent when they speak, which is associated with their geographical location, and the dialect they speak will have differences in grammar and vocabulary. Some dialects are prestigious when used in some social situations or in some social groups. Historically the most prestigious dialect of English is the Received Pronunciation (RP - the 'Queen's English', or 'BBC English').

It is difficult to separate regional and social factors, because people from a certain region or area are often associated with a certain social class as well. But, it is accepted that in Australia, there are three general dialects or accents of English, *Broad*, *General* and *Cultivated*. These are associated with regional areas and also with social status or class. Even though Australians like to think of themselves as egalitarian and not having social classes, there are expectations that someone with a high socio-economic position will speak a higher-prestige variety of Australian English. The table below shows some of the differences in vowel pronunciation between RP, and the Australian English dialects.

Lexical Sets	RP	Broad Aus E	General Aus E	Cultivated Aus E
BATH	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:
NURSE	ɜ:	ɜ:	ɜ:	ɜ:
FLEECE	i:	ə:ɪ	+ i	ii
PALM	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:
FACE	eɪ	ʌ:ɪ, a:ɪ	ʌɪ	ɛɪ
GOAT	əʊ	ʌ:ʊ, a:ɥ	ʌɥ	öʊ
GOOSE	u:	ə:ɥ	ʊɥ	ʊu
PRICE	aɪ	ɒ:ɪ	ɒɪ	aɪ
MOUTH	aʊ	ɛ:o	æo	aʊ
NEAR	ɪə	ɪə, i:ə, i:	ɪə, i:ə, i:	ɪə
SQUARE	ɛə	eə	eə	eə
START	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:
CURE	ʊə	ʊə, ɔ:, u:ə, u:	ʊə, ɔ:, u:ə, u:	ʊə, ɔ:, u:ə, u:



ACTIVITIES

Language Types and Language Variation

1. If you haven't done so already, search online to read and research further on variations in Australian English. Listen and compare other world dialects of English. YouTube is a good resource for this kind of search.
2. What word would you use for each of the following?
 - Processed sausage-like meat often used in sandwiches.
 - Small red skinned sausages.
 - Cardboard single serve containers of fruit juice.
 - Item of clothing worn when swimming.



Answers:

1. This meat is generally known as *devon* in Sydney and on the East coast, *fritz* in South Australia and *polony* in Western Australia. It is also variously known as: *beef Belgium*, *Belgium sausage*, *Byron sausage*, *Empire sausage*, *fritz*, *German sausage*, *luncheon sausage*, *polony*, *pork German*, *Strasburg*, *wheel meat* or *Windsor sausage*.
2. Most commonly referred to as *frankfurts* (or sometimes *frankfurters*). Generally a *frankfurt* is a large sized one, rather than the little ones used for party snacks - which are most commonly called *cocktail frankfurts*, *little boys* and *cheerios* (in Queensland).
3. In New South Wales it is referred to as a *popper*, in other states it is usually referred to as a *fruit box* or a *juice box*. A possible reason it is called a popper is, that when a young kid finished with the contents (or even if they were not) they would blow the popper up like a balloon and the stamp on it "popping" the "popper". This would perhaps spray others in juice. Usually after lunch hour there would be flat poppers spread across the schoolyard. Sometimes they are also referred to by popular brand names, such as *Prima*.
4. *Bathers* seems to be the most generic term used. Other terms include: *swimmers*, *cossie*, *costume*, *swimsuit* or *togs*. More specific terms are *bikini*, *speedos*, *racers*, *sluggos*, or *boardies* (*boardshorts*). *Trunks* is sometimes used, but usually by expatriate British.