

# Typological Classification of Languages

# Definition

- Languages are described by their *types* rather than by their origins and relationships
- The type under which languages are classified follows morphological classification

# Language Types

- Isolating
- Agglutinating/agglutinative
- Inflecting/flectional/fusional
- Polysynthetic/incorporating

# Isolating languages

- One-to-one correspondence between words and morphemes
- One word formations
- Free morphemes are the only forms used
- The “word” (free morpheme) can occur by itself and is not dependent on any other morphemes.

# Isolating languages

- It is an unalterable unit whose function in the sentence is not usually marked by some grammatical device (affix, auxiliary) but only by position.
- Since the boundaries of syllables and morphemes *coincide*, these languages are sometimes referred to as monosyllabic.

# Isolating Languages

- Examples: Chinese, Vietnamese, and many languages of South East Asia
- Ex (Chinese): 我看他 *wo kan ta*  
“I see him”; “I am seeing him”  
他看我朋友 *Ta kan wo peng you*  
“He sees my friend”

# Flexional/Fusional/Inflecting Languages

- Grammatical devices like *affixes* or internal changes in words to show grammatical relationships
- Free and bound morphemes are united
- Ex. Walk, walk-**s**, walk-**ing**, walk-**ed**
- Internal change: mouse-mice  
goose-geese

# Flexional/Fusional/Inflecting Languages (2)

- Several units of meaning are contained within a single word
  - Latin, **ib** “I shall go” (base: *i* “go”; *-b(i)-* is the future tense morpheme; *-* “is the first person singular
  - Sanskrit **vad** **mi** (*vad-* the base ‘speak’; *(a)mi*) ‘first person singular’



# Agglutinating/Agglutinative Languages

- A type of flexional language with the exception that the morphemes attached have a separate existence (= free morpheme)
- Implication: the boundaries between the morphemes are always clear because their shape remains the same

# Agglutinating/Agglutinative Languages: Example

- Turkish *adam* 'man'
  - nominative: adam (sg)      adam-lar (pl)
  - accusative: adam-i (sg)      adam-lar-i (pl)
  - genitive:      adam-in      adam-lar-in (pl)
  - dative:      adam-a      adam-lar-a
  - locative      adam-da      adam-lar-da
  - ablative      adam-dan      adam-lar-dan

# Agglutinative vs Flexional

## Hungarian

- Nom. *su* “water”
- Gen. *su-num*
- Acc. *su-yu*
- Abl. *su-dan*

## Latin

- *aqua*
- *aquæ*
- *aquam*
- *aqu*□

# Japanese *tabesaserareru*

- *tabe* “eat” (the base)
- *sase* “the causative element (i.e. to cause someone to do something)”
- *rare* “the passive form”
- *ru* “the infinitive”

# Swahili

- Grammatical changes are indicated by *prefixes*:
  - *-toto* (indicating ‘child’: non-grammatical)
  - *m-toto* (‘child’ singular: grammatical word)
  - *wa-toto* (“children”)
  - *m-tu* (“man-sg.”)
  - *wa-tu* (“men”)

# Swahili (2)

- Verbs: The time of the action expressed by the verb is marked by a “tense prefix”:
  - *na-* (present)
  - *li-* (past)
  - *ta-* (future)

## Swahili (3)

- Verb base *soma* 'read'
  - *watoto wanasoma*
  - *watoto walisoma*
  - *ninasoma* (*ni-* is first person)
  - *unasoma* (*u-* is you-sg.)
  - *ulisoma*
  - *utasoma*

# Polysynthetic/Incorporating Languages

- These languages make use of affixation and often incorporate what English would represent with nouns and adverbs.
- The word forms are often very long and morphologically complex
- Languages: Inuktitut (Baffin Island Eskimo), Oneida)



# Polysynthetic/Incorporating Languages (2)

- *g-nagla-sl-i-zak-s*
  - *g* “I” (first person)
  - *nagla* (conveys idea of) “living”
  - *sl* (causes *nagla* to be noun-like; the combination conveys the idea of “village”)
  - *i* verbal prefix, indicates that *zak* is to carry a verbal idea
  - *zak* ‘look for’
  - *s* ‘continued action’

# Polysynthetic/Incorporating Languages (3)

- *ngirruunthingapukani*
- I    past   for some time   eat   repeatedly

# Polysynthetic/Incorporating Languages (4)

- Tavva- -guuq ikpiarju(q) -ku(t)  
Then (suddenly) they say work-bag by
- -Luni- tigualaka -mi -uk takanu-  
while she swept up (loc) by (poss) that one  
(in one motion) there below
- -nga ikijaq- tuq- Luni quja(q)r- mun  
her way out she kayak towards
- “Then (suddenly) she swept up (poss) work-bag that one there  
below her she way out towards kayak”

# Non-exclusi vity

- None of these four types are mutually exclusive.
- In English, there is a movement towards a more isolating type of structure.
- Yet, all elements appear in English.

# English

- Isolating: *The boy will ask the girl.*
- Inflecting: *The biggest boys will be asking all the girls to the party.*
- Agglutinating: *anti-dis-establish-ment-arian-ism*
- Incorporating: “*whacchamacallit*”  
“This is the *whatchamacallit*.”