

Canonical Typology: progress and prospects. Category: oral presentation

Typology has arguably never been healthier, with regular conferences, typological papers in top journals and the availability of new tools including typological databases and *WALS*. Yet the challenges remain substantial, and it makes sense to work out new approaches. Canonical Typology has been applied to phenomena in syntax, notably agreement (Evans 2003, Corbett 2003, 2006, Comrie 2003, Polinsky 2003, Seifart 2005, Suthar 2006) and in morphology, including heterocclisis (Stump 2006), suppletion (Corbett 2007a) and doublets (Thornton 2008). This paper assesses our progress, offers an illustrative example, and considers the prospects for Canonical Typology.

Challenges addressed: typologists are confronted by a paradox. We have too much data: there are so many languages that we sometimes slip into counting phenomena before we have robust analyses. And conversely, as we ask increasingly sophisticated questions of the declining body of languages we find that there is insufficient data. In terms of analysis, the Correspondence Problem is always with us: we have to ensure that we are genuinely comparing like with like. This encourages us to work hard at definitions, while recognizing that definitions stemming from different traditions may bring with them assumptions that are hard to forget. Moreover, each of these challenges is complicated by the fact that we are often dealing with gradient phenomena.

Key notions: canonical accounts regularly appeal to five notions. A *principle* is an umbrella statement, for example: ‘a canonical morphosyntactic feature has robust formal marking’. *Criteria* are the specific statements, explicating the principles, for example: ‘canonical features and their values have a dedicated form’. The criteria are not in competition, rather they show *convergence* at a canonical point. Such points exhibit *recognizability*: we have no difficulty in accepting canonical examples. And rooted at the canonical point we define a *theoretical space*, where the actual examples can be located.

Illustration: we examine morphosyntactic features and values. For these, two overarching principles (covering ten converging criteria) have been proposed: a canonical morphosyntactic feature (I) has robust formal marking (as just mentioned); and (II) is constrained by simple rules of syntax. Compared against this canonical standard, various non-canonical behaviours have been identified. For example, lack of robust formal marking underlies non-autonomous case values (Zaliznjak 1973), see Figure 1, and the worst case here is polarity (Baerman 2007). Rather than being restricted to one feature, parallel non-canonical behaviour recurs in different features (sometimes with different traditional labels), as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Prospects: more complex phenomena are tackled by proposing interactions between canonical typologies (thus, canonical morphosyntactic features can be differentiated through their interactions with canonical parts of speech). And ‘second level’ phenomena are being addressed: for example, inflectional classes are instances of non-canonical inflectional morphology, but we can now specify what would be a canonical inflectional class. Finally, new areas for Canonical Typology are increasingly coming under scrutiny, including negation (Bond), subordination (van Gijn) and ideophones (Dingemanse).

Examples:

Figure 1: Non-autonomous **case** value (Classical Armenian *azg* ‘a people’)

SINGULAR	PLURAL	
<i>azg</i>	<i>azgk'</i>	NOMINATIVE
<i>azg</i>	<i>azgs</i>	ACCUSATIVE
<i>azgi</i>	<i>azgs</i>	LOCATIVE
<i>azgi</i>	<i>azgac'</i>	DATIVE

In this example (from Baerman 2002) there is no unique form for the accusative; its forms are always syncretic. We do still recognize an accusative case value, necessary for rules of syntax. At the same time, we recognize that it is a less canonical feature value than the nominative or dative.

Figure 2: Non-autonomous **gender** value (Romanian *înalt* ‘tall’; Corbett 2007b: 245-249)

SINGULAR	PLURAL	
<i>înalt</i>	<i>înalt-i</i>	MASCULINE
<i>înalt</i>	<i>înalt-e</i>	NEUTER
<i>înalt-ă</i>	<i>înalt-e</i>	FEMININE

Figure 3: Non-autonomous **person** value (Old Nubian present indicative *doll-* ‘wish’; Browne 2002: 50, Bechhaus-Gerst 1996: 237, Baerman, Brown & Corbett 2005: 75):

SINGULAR	PLURAL	
<i>dollire</i>	<i>dollira</i>	1 PERSON
<i>dollina</i>	<i>dolliro</i>	2 PERSON
<i>dollina</i>	<i>dollirana</i>	3 PERSON