

Lexical categories in Functional Typology

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- Language- and construction-specific word classes. i.e.
- No pre-established/universal categories
- Universal tendencies of mapping form classes onto pragmatic/ semantic function/meaning

(Croft & Van Lier 2012)

“The diversity of language is its most remarkable property.”

(Evans & Levinson 2009)

Diversity Linguistics



Word classes



- “Clearly, all languages allow their speakers to talk about people, things, and events, and all languages have specialized words for meanings such as ‘mother’, ‘tree’, ‘sleep’ and ‘hit’.
- But how do we know that the ‘tree’ word in a language is a *noun*?”

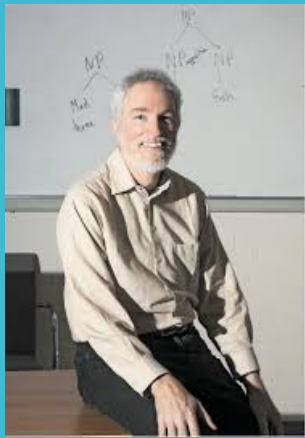
(Haspelmath 2009)

Defining word classes



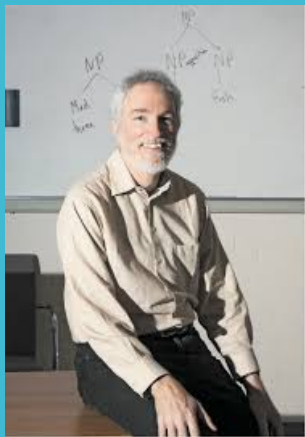
- Meaning?
 - Noun: entity (person, thing, etc.)
 - Verb: action, process, state
- Function?
 - Noun refers
 - Verb predicates
- Form?
 - Noun: case, gender, etc.
 - Verb: person/number, TAME

Croft 1991,
2001, ...



		meaning	
function		action	entity
	predication	VERB	
	reference		NOUN

Croft 1991,
2001, ...



		meaning	
function		action	entity
	predication	VERB	
	reference		NOUN

Two structural universals:

- Atypical combinations are marked by at least as many morphemes (“structural coding”) as typical ones
- The range of “behavioural potential” of typical combinations must be at least as wide as that of atypical combinations

Examples: English

- Jane run-**s**.
- *Jane carpenter-**s**.
- Jane **is** a carpenter.

- Jane listens to **a** string quartet.
- Jane listens to John's sing**ing**.
- *Jane listens to **a** singing.

Examples: Teop

(Western Oceanic,
Mosel 2017)

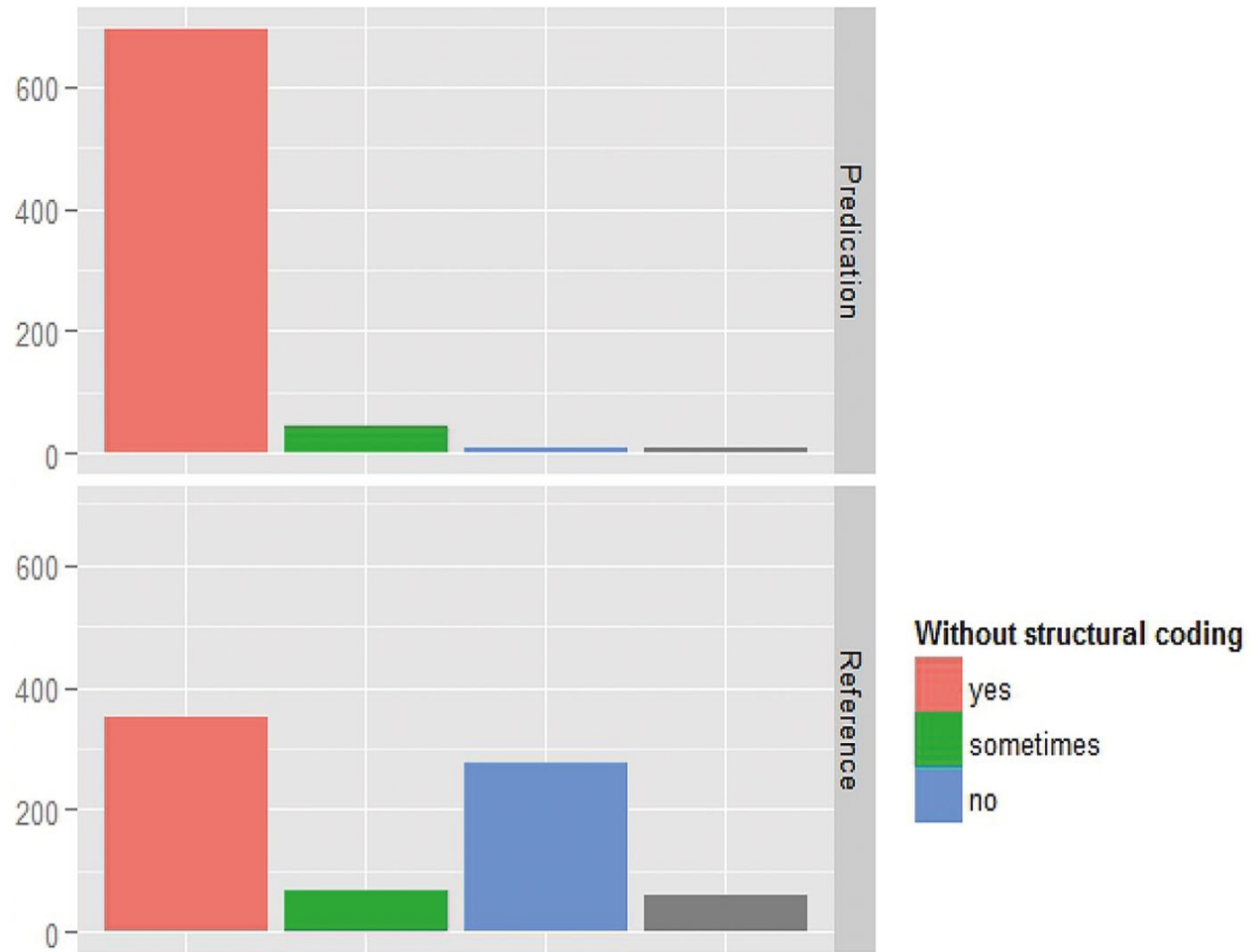


- A moon na **hio** nana
ART woman **TAM** sit **IPFV.3SG**
'the woman was sitting'
- E Magaru na **aba** nana
ART Earthquake **TAM** person **IPFV.3SG**
'Earthquake **was** a human being.'
- paku ta meha **taba**
do/make **ART** other thing
'(he) did another thing'
- ...bona **paku** sinivi
ART do/make canoe
'(he taught) the canoe making'

Flexible (?) word classes

(Van Lier 2016)

36 Oceanic languages, 14 semantic sub-categories



Behavioural potential



Samoan (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992):

- le alu o le pasi
DEF/*~~∅~~ go of the bus
'the going of the bus'

Cf. Nootka (Evans & Osada 2005):

- qu:ʔas=ma mamku:k-ʔi
man=PRS.IND work-DEF/*~~∅~~
'the working one is a man.'
- But Foley fc.: Historically, Southern Wakashan
DEF<3SG.IND!

Construction-specific word classes in Teop

- paa moon beera
TAM woman big
'(she) had become a big woman'
- A paku **va**-hata
ART do **ADV**-bad
'the doing badly/the bad behaviour'



Frequency

Teop word	Meaning	Predication	Reference
mosi	'cut'	118	7
nao	'go'	882	6
paku	'do, make'	806	5
moon	'woman'	8	559
iana	'fish'	0	356
taba	'thing'	2	519

Semantics



- **Semantic compositionality**
or flexibility vs. conversion

(see a.o. Evans & Osada 2005, Van Lier 2009, Rijkhoff & Van Lier 2013, Van Lier 2012, François 2017, Mithun 2017)

- Conversion shows 'accidental' gaps, e.g. English hammer_{N/V} but not: desk_{N/V}

cf. Central Alaskan Yupik (Mithun 2017):

kuvya = 'fishnet_N' or 'fish.with.a.net_V'

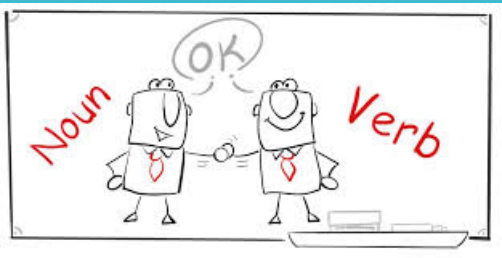
panger = paddle_{N/*V!}

- Conversion often contrasts with overt derivation, e.g. Hiw (François 2017)

ṛekove 'work_{N/V}', but

tō 'walk_V' → tō-ove walk-NMLZ

Conclusion?



- “Although the recent literature in linguistic typology has downplayed the importance of language universals, there is good reason to assume that [...] the distinction between nouns and verbs is truly universal.”

(Diessel 2019: 157)

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