

A SEARCH FOR UNIVERSALS IN TWO GENETICALLY UNRELATED LANGUAGES

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The concept of language universals

The last two decades have seen a remarkable upsurge of interest in language universals. Linguists seem to agree that many structural properties are so common in languages of the world that their widespread occurrence requires some special explanation. Such properties are referred to as language universals.

Transformationalists have made a distinction between formal and substantive language universals. Substantive universals are those categories that are posited as language universals. In syntax, for instance, they might include such categories as verb, noun, noun phrase, subject, direct object main verb etc. In phonology a clear example would be the distinctive features of Jakobsonian phonology. The Jakobsonian theory claims that the phonological System of any arbitrary language will make use of no direct distinctive feature not contained in the list, although it is not necessary that any individual language should make use of the whole set (thus English does not make distinctive use of the feature checked (comrie 1993 : 150). Formal universals, on the other hand, are rather statements on the form of rules of grammar. As an example, we may take claim that no language can have a formal rule that operates by giving a left-right inversion of a string of arbitrary length. This means that no language can form questions by simply inverting the word order, so that the question corresponding to : «This is the house that Jack built» would be built Jack that house the is this ? This particular formal universal is a special case of a more general formal universal proposed by transformation lists, namely that transformations are structure-dependent operations.

Another parameter along which universals can be classified is that distinguishing absolute universals, i.e, those that are exceptionless, and those that exist as tendencies, but do still have exceptions. According to Comrie, this distinction is independent of that between implicational and non-implicational universals, giving over all a four-fold classification :

- a -- absolute non-implicational universals such as : all languages have vowels.
- b -- absolute implicational universals such as : if a language has VSO as its basic word order, then it has prepositions.
- c -- non-implicational tendencies, such as : nearly all languages have nasal consonants (although some Salishan languages have no nasal consonants).
- d -- implicational tendencies, such as : if a language has SOV basic word order, it will probably have postpositions (but Persian, for instance, is SOV with prepositions).

Explanations for language Universals

According to the transformational-generative approach to language universals it is maintained that the question of explaining language universals has no obvious solution : they are there because they are innate. However, this explanation as Comrie rightly assumes, is never argued for on independent grounds, and so the only reason for accepting innateness seems to be the absence of any plausible, comprehensive alternative. This approach suffers from a number of serious defects which stem mainly from the fact that the argumentation is almost entirely a priori, with virtually no appeal to actual data supporting the

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position being argued for. Comrie rightly suggests that the only direct appeal to facts, namely that children learn any language with comparable facility, serves only to establish a non-universal, the specific language as a whole cannot be innate. In fact it is suggested that to carry out detailed work on language universals one needs a representative sample of languages, representative being defined in particular as absence of genetic, areal, or typological bias ; hence our attempt to search for universals in English and Arabic. This approach is most closely associated with the work of Joseph Greenberg and those inspired by his work.

A common origin for all the world's languages might seem an obvious explanation for language universals. These universals would simply have been properties of the putative ancestor language, and the only reason why they would be found in all of the world's languages today would be that all of these languages have retained these features of the ancestor language without change. The parameters on which languages vary would represent areas where individual languages have undergone change, without there being necessarily any other common property binding together the language universals. This explanation is not ruled out by a number of prominent linguists including Maxmuller, Bolinger, Semerano, Jespersen and Pei to mention only a few. Mario Pei (1968 :357) states :

Perennially the question comes up if there was original unity among such widely diversified tongues as English, Russian, Greek, Armenian and Hindustani, what is there belie the possibility that at a much remoter epoch all of the world's languages may have sprung from one common stock ? May not the Biblical account of Babel's tower of confusion be figuratively, even if not literally, true ? There is nothing to belie this possibility, just as there is nothing to oppose the theory that Truman and Stalin may have sprung from a common original ancestor some hundreds of generations ago.

Maxmuller seems to advocate the monogenesis theory of language when he states that if we wish to assert that language had various beginnings, we

must prove it impossible that language could have had a common origin. No such impossibility has even been established with regard to a common origin of Aryan and Semitic dialects.

Comrie (1983 : 23), on the other hand, claims that the disadvantage of monogenesis as a putative explanation of language universals also is that it is completely speculative and untestable. He adds that if all the world's languages descended from a single ancestor-and this question must remain open - then the time - depth between this ancestor and our earliest attestations of language is so great that we would have no hope of establishing this monogenetic origin, or of tracing the changes that separate proto-world from attested languages. The above claim seems to have a number of weaknesses both on religious and linguistic grounds. That the monogenesis theory is completely speculative seems not to conform to the holy scriptures. According to Judeo - Christian - Muslim beliefs, God gave Adam the power to name all things. Says the old testament (Genesis 2 : 19) :

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air ; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them : and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

And the Holy Quran (2 : 32) says :

And God taught Adam all the names
According to the Holy Quran language is as old as the creation of man :

He has created man and taught him plain speech (55 :45)

As to the claim that monogenesis theory is untestable, one may refer to work done in this area by Bolinger (1975), Semerano (1979) and Abderrahman (1991). Bolinger has devoted a whole chapter entitled «The Origin Language», where he rightly states that not many years ago this chapter would have been forbidden ground since origins were not to be talked about because they could not be investigated, only guessed at. He goes on to say that known linguistic traces go back to about 5000 B.C,

but beyond that nothing is recoverable. The hypothesis of a single primordial language, however persists like the story of Adam and Eve, the single pair from whom all the human beings have sprung. The fact many divergent languages today can be traced back to one ancestor - Russian and Czech, for example, to common Slavic - suggests that if one were to go back far enough all lines would converge as suggested by Bolinger.

According to Giovanni Semerano, an Italian scholar a classicist and author of other works on early European civilization and the former superintendent of the National Libraries in the Florence area, the assumption that most of the European languages, ancient and modern, belong to a convenient category known as Indo-European, may not be quite right. He has found that the origins of many European words are not what etymologists have stated, or guessed them to be. The roots lie deeper in the past than Athens or Rome. They are in the Tigris - Euphrates valley, and in the Akkadian language of 3000 B.C. This, in my view, may well explain the striking similarities between Indo - European and Semitic languages in general and between English and Arabic in particular. The present researcher has cited scores of Arabic and English words bearing formal and semantic correspondences to each other which cannot be explained in terms of lexical borrowing.

I think that etymology may well play a vital role in establishing a monogenesis theory of language and that the first step towards achieving this goal would be to make an inventory of basic, primitive roots of a sample of languages which belong to different families and then to start looking for formal and semantic similarities.

Morphological Universals in English and Arabic

Although alot of ink has been spilled on various aspects of Arabic morphology such as derivation, word-calsses, neologisation etc, the present researches maintains that many aspects still need to be thoroughly investigated in the light of modern linguistic research. Both Arab linguists and orientlists seem to have made a number of claims which, in my view, don't hold water as will, hopefully, be illustrated below. Among such claims

is that Arabic, unlike English, has various types of derivation. This claim is widely held in the Arabic linguistic circles. That it is taken to be Gospel-true (see Stetkevych 1970:7-9, Ouhalla 1988 b : 25, McCarthy 1981 :379, and Ghazal 1976 :37) to mention only a few.

Beeston (1970 : 31), on the other hand, maintains that the establishment of word classes for any language can be undertaken on a morphological or functional basis, or both. He claims that for Arabic it is necessary to take account of both because the identification of words as adjectives is possible only on a functional basis, since their morphological structure is no way distinctive. Cowan (1978 : 39) also believes that the Arab makes no grammatical distinction between noun and adjective and any adjective may be used as a noun. As for the formation adverbs in Arabic, Bateson (1967 : 43) and Cowan (1978 : 63) maintain that there is no real class of adverbs corresponding to the English and that the common way of rendering an adverb is to use the noun or the adjective in the accusative.

The present researcher, however, tends to disagree with the above-mentioned claims.

1. The so-called «derivations»

Stetkevych, among several other linguists, rightly states that Arabic has been called the language of derivation, since derivation from existing roots has always been considered the most natural way of neologisation.

This ability to grow from its own esence has given the language its rare homogeneousness, which is the pride of Arab writers and linguists and which they are zealous to protect. Orientalists and Arab linguists alike distinguish three main forms of derivation : the simple derivation «*alishtiqaq assaghir*» the large derivation «*alishtiqaq alkabir*» and the largest derivation «*alishtiqaq alakbar*».

It is commonly held that the simple derivation, which corresponds to derivation in English and other languages as defined in modern linguistic theory i.e. the forming of new words by combining derivational affixes or bound bases with existing words, is the only form of derivation which remained fully operative after the formative stage of the Arabic language.

Here the radical consonants are not changed in any way, but are derived from and built upon. This type of derivation can be class changing such as *kataba*, *ka:tib*, *maktu:b*, *maktab*, *maktaba* etc or class-maintaining as is the case of deriving augmented forms from the basic form *faʿala*, e.g. *kataba*, *ka:taba*, *ʔaktaba*, *ʔistaktaba*, *taka:taba* all of which are trilateral derived verbal forms.

The large derivation which is said to reflect, most of all, the formative archaic stages of Arabic and that it is also relatively frequent in medieval Arabic, as well as in colloquialisms, is characterized by the change of position of radicals. Thus *jadhaba* «to draw, to attract» may give *jabadha*, *kabasa* «to press» may give *kasaba* «to gain». It is maintained that the influence of this form of «derivation» upon the formation of modern terms is a minor one in comparison to the simple derivation (see Stetkevych 1970 :46)- I, however, tend to disagree with the above claim for two obvious reasons : firstly, because the radicals of the word are not kept in the same order and secondly because the meaning is violated as a result of that change. Besides, this type of so-called derivation does not conform to the definition of derivation given above and can at best be called metathesis which is, undoubtedly, not a morphological process of word formation.

Stetkevych (1970 : 46-47) maintains that the third type of derivation, the largest derivation «*alishtiqaq alakbar*» consists in the change within a word of one of the radicals. The basic meaning of the root is retained either wholly or partly. Thus *na ʿ aqa*, *naḥaqa* and *naqqa* share the meaning of : animal «cry» and «croaking». *Thalama* and *thalaba* mean to «slander»; and so on. While Stetkevych claims that this kind of derivation has played the least important role in modern literary Arabic, Ghazal (1976 : 37) calls for a more active role of this derivation as it constitutes a major source of neologisation. The present researcher, however, cannot but disagree with the above statements. This type of so-called derivation, which, unfortunately continues to have advocates even nowadays in Arab and Western universities (see Harbi 1990, Ouhalla, Shahin 1983, 1988 b, and Tarzi 1975) was invented by Al-Khalil bin Ahmed and called *muthallathu*

Al-Khalil «the triangle of Al-Khalil» to account for the number of lexical roots that can be generated by permuting every combination of three letters from the Arabic alphabet ; for example, the root D-R-B, to beat is said to yield D-B-R, R-D-B, R-B-D, B-D-R and B-R-D as is illustrated below :



By carefully examining the third form of derivation, one notes again that it does not conform to the definition held universally for several reasons ; firstly, because roots like K-T-B, K-B-T, B-T-K, B-K-T etc are not related either morphologically or semantically ; secondly these roots are completely independent and are listed as different lexical entries in dictionaries. Thirdly, different words having totally different meanings are sometimes listed under the same lexical entry, e.g. *dhahaba* «to go» and *dhahab* «gold» which are listed under DH-H-B.

Moreover, contrary to what has been stated about the importance of this so-called derivation, I think that its role amounts to nothing.

In conclusion I have given some basic facts which will hopefully, show that the theory of derivation in Arabic does leak and thus needs to be reconsidered in the light of results of this research. For claiming that the above mentioned roots are derivands of one and the same root leads one to treat the English words *nap*, *pan*, *tea*, *eat*, and *pin*, *nip* respectively in the same way.

2. The formation of adjectives

Beeston (1970 : 31) rightly assumes that the establishment of word classes for any language can be undertaken on a morphological or functional basis, or both. He adds, however, that for Arabic it is necessary to take account of both. For example, verbs are principally identifiable as such by their morphological shape, since the functions which they

embody can be performed by words other than verbs ; while on the other hand the identification of words as adjectives is possible only on a functional basis; since their morphological structure is in no way distinctive. Cowan (1978 : 39), on the other hand states that the Arab makes no grammatical distinction between noun and adjective and any adjective may be used as a noun.

The present researcher, however, thinks that Beeston's and Cowan's statements are but sweeping generalisations that need not be left unquestioned. My claim is that adjectives in Arabic can be identified on a morphological basis and that there is a real class of adjectives corresponding to the English one. It seems that adjectives are formed by adding the suffix (- iyy) to nouns which, in turn, serve as operands. Here are some few examples :

Noun	Adjective	
?insa : n	?insa:niyy	«humane»
Sina : ? a	Sina : ? iyy	«artificial»
Tabi : ? a	Tabi : ? iyy	«natural»
qalb	qalbiyy	«cordial»
faransa	faransiyy	«French»
ra?s	ra?siyy	«vertical»
?ufuq	?ufuqiyy	«horizontal»
Tibb	Tibiyy	«medical»
ta:ri:x	ta:ri:xiyy	«historical»
?isla :m	?isla:miyy	«Islamic»
?iqtiSa:d	?iqtiSa : diyy	«economic»

In fact this of derivation seems to be highly productive and occurs very frequently in Arabic.

Moreover, the following morphosemanthemes, according to Assuyuti (pp5-35), seem to be confined only to adjectives :

fa ? ill	fu??u:l
fiya ? l	mif ? ala:
fan ? al	maf ? alla:
fi ? lal	fu ?? all
fa ? lan	fi ?? ill
fu ? lam	fa ? allal
?infa ? l	fu ? lull
fu ? ay ? il	fa ? alla:
fa ? awwal	fi ? lila : ?
fa ? anlal	fa ? lall

To the above list of adjective word class in Arabic, the following morphosemanthemes may be added :

fa ? il
e.g. marih «merry», waqih «rude», naziq «frivolous»
fa ? la :n
e.g. na ? sa:n «sleepy», ?a?sha:n «thirsty»
fa ? u:l
e.g. jah :l «very ignorant», kasu :l «very lazy».

3. The formation of adverbs

According to Cowan (1978 : 63) Arabic is said to be exceedingly poor in adverbs and that the common way of rendering an adverb is to use the corresponding adjective in the accusative, e.g. rakada sari : ? an «He ran wiftly» ; qadima baTi :? an «He approached slowly». Bateson (1967 :43), on the other hand, maintains that there is no real class of adverbs corresponding to the English one. She adds that Arabic has a number of adverbial particles, e.g. faqaT «only» which follows the verb, but most of the load carried in English by adverbs is carried in Arabic by nouns in the accusative.

The present researcher, however, argues that there is a real class of adverbs in Arabic formed as illustrated below :

a. Adjective + the suffix (-an) :

e.g,
?iqtiSadiyyan economically
dawliyyan internationally
sanawiyyan annually
siya:siyyan politically
isla:miyyan Islamically

This type of adverbs, which expresses the point of view, seems to have the same layers of derivation exactly as is the case in English :

English	Arabic
economy (n)	?iqtiSa:d (n)
economic (adj)	?iqtiSa:diyy (adj)
economically (adv)	?iqtiSa:diyyan (adv)
Islam (n)	Isla:m (n)
Islamic (adj)	isla:miyy (adj)
Islamically (adv)	isla:miyyan (adv)

In fact, Arabic is quite rich in this area of derivation.

b. Present participle + the suffix (-an) :

e.g,

mutaka:silan	lazily
ma:ziḥan	jokingly
Da:ḥikan	laughingly
mukhlīṣan	sincerely
gha:Diban	angrily

c. Noun + the suffix (-an) :

e.g,

ghaṣṣan	by force
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﴿وكان وراءهم ملك يأخذ كل سفينة غصبا﴾

(الكهف : 89)

«.... for there was a king behind them who was taking every ship by force» The Holy Quran XV 111 :79

?anwatan	forcibly
huznan	out of sadness
faraḥan	out of happiness

d. The prefix (ḥ- -) + noun :

e.g,

biṣ unf	violently
bisuhu:la	easily, with ease
bighaDab	angrily, with anger

One may add here that a number of English verbs modified by an adverb are translated into Arabic by one word; e.g.

It rains heavily	yahTul
He speaks loudly	yajhar
He gives generously	yughdiq
He laughs boisterously	yuqahqih

In conclusion, I have given some basic facts about certain aspects of Arabic morphology : i.e the scope of derivation and the establishment of adjectives and adverbs. I have also argued for a monogenesis theory to explain language universals and think that Arabic can better be understood in the light of modern linguistic research on language universals. It is said that surface linguistic diversity may sometimes conceal underlying uniformity and this seems to be the case in English and Arabic.

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