



*Typology of small-scale
multilingualism*
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A TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MULTILINGUALISM

Kaius Sinnemäki
General Linguistics
Kaius.sinnemaki@helsinki.fi

RATIONALE

In sociolinguistics, comparative research tends to be variationist, corpus-based, and limited to a few languages at a time (Tagliamonte 2002).

Question:

- What if the aim was to compare multilingualism across many different language communities at the same time?

Challenge:

- Understanding multilingualism seems to presuppose description of unique grouping of sociolinguistic features (Di Carlo et al. 2019).

Hypothesis:

- Large-scale comparative sociolinguistics can benefit from lessons learned in typology.

FROM TYPOLOGY TO SOCIO- LINGUISTICS

Linguistic usage patterns are highly context-dependent and language-specific. How to compare them across diverse languages?

- Define comparative concepts; no universal or descriptive categories (Haspelmath 2010).
- Identify definitional vs. correlational aspects of the object and context.

E.g. case marking of the object (Sinnemäki 2014):

- Define case marking and object using functional and formal criteria (e.g. Blake 2001).
- Delimit context to prototypical transitive clauses, e.g. *They pushed the car*.
- Identify correlational aspects, such as semantic properties of the referent.

Concept evaluation:

- How well they delimit the object of study
- Do they allow meaningful generalizations?

But: abstraction leads also to information loss.

| | Linguistic domain | Societal domain |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Behaviour | Linguistic conventions | Social conventions |
| Description | Descriptive (linguistic) categories | Descriptive (social) categories |
| Comparison | Comparative (linguistic) concepts | Comparative (social) concepts |

Table 1: Parallel levels of analysis in the linguistic and societal domains.

Apply these ideas to sociolinguistic features. (also Table 1)

→ Define multilingualism (and its subtypes) as comparative concepts.

→ Identify definitional & correlating features.

EXAMPLE: (A)SYMMETRICAL MULTILINGUALISM

A comparative concept for *multilingualism*:

- Speakers of community X speak also language of community of Y.

Should symmetry be defined in terms of demography, language status, prestige, or hierarchy? If demography, a starting point for the definition could be:

- In *symmetrical multilingualism* speakers in language communities X and Y generally speak also each other's language.
- In *asymmetrical multilingualism* speakers of language community X generally speak also language of community Y who generally do not speak language of community X.
 - E.g. Sanzhi Dargwa and Standard Dargwa in Daghestan (Forker 2019).

Concepts also requiring definition:

- *generally, language, speak(er), community*.

What about relative community size or cultural practices, such as marriage patterns (linguistic exogamy), subsistence type (hunter-gatherers), religion, and habitat (rural, urban)?

These are potentially correlational features whose relationship to multilingualism can be tested separately.

- A hypothesis: the more the communities differ in their numbers of speakers, the more likely multilingualism is asymmetrical.

FUTURE WORK

The idea of adapting methods from language typology to comparison in sociolinguistics serves as a basis for building a large-scale database for sociolinguistic environments of language communities. Features would include relative intensity of language contact vs. isolation; multilingualism; typological distances of languages in contact; differences in prestige; number of L2 speakers; etc.

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