

European Summer School in Linguistic Typology

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Linguistic typology: traditional and canonical

Typology aims to answer the question “what is a possible human language?” by specifying a number of types of possible language, and excluding the others. Classifying languages as whole proves impractical, and so the problem is broken down into components (word order, expression of particular features, and so on). For this, Greenberg (1963) is essential and enlightening reading.

We then move to developments after Greenberg, the successes and problems, and concentrate on the issue how well-studied and familiar systems can skew our analyses. We look at one development, Canonical Typology, and consider what it can offer in answer to the skewing problem, particularly in the area of feature systems (such as gender and number). The course will range over various challenging and interesting languages and there will be ample opportunity for participants to participate with data, criticism and analyses.