

## Universals Explain Change, Change Explains Typological Generalizations

Structural and generative theories have attempted to derive general properties of language change from structural principles. An older view, recently regaining popularity, reverses the direction of explanation by deriving putative universals, recast as typological generalizations, from recurrent patterns of language change (Blevins MS). Its more conservative versions draw on historical explanation as a kind of supplement to the formal theory of grammar, which explains “marked” or even anomalous structures that fall outside the remit of UG. The more radical versions seek to explain away the universals themselves as by-products of change.

Reconciling these opposing programs for historical and synchronic linguistics requires demarcating the explanatory role of each, by distinguishing true universals from typological generalizations in a principled way. I argue that this can be done by the following criteria.

- Universals have no exceptions (for what does not arise by change cannot be subverted by it either).
- Universals are process-independent.
- Universals are manifested in TETU effects (Prince & Smolensky 1993).
- Universals are embedded in grammars as constraints and can interact with other constraints.
- Universals constitute pathways for analogical change.
- Universals are manifested spontaneously in language acquisition.

I then apply these criteria to two phonological universals which have been claimed to be epiphenomena of change, and show that the criteria converge to identify them as true universals.

(i) Coda neutralization of place and manner features in favor of unmarked values. I argue that this markedness asymmetry reflects a UG constraint (as assumed in OT, among others), against the claim that it simply reflects the putative historical fact that sound change can devoice codas but not voice them (Blevins MS, Yu 2004).

First, the historicist argument overlooks that synchronic coda voicing *could* originate by common sound changes in many other ways than by a coda voicing sound change. If a language with a single series of obstruents and a gemination contrast with coda degemination undergoes a lenition process that transposes the geminate/singleton contrast into a voiceless/voiced contrast (as in Romance), the result would be final voicing. The reason such hypothetical scenarios are never realized must be that *some constraint on language design prevents it*.

Next I rebut Yu’s proposal (*Language* 2004) that Lezgian has synchronic syllable-final voicing. Rather, it has the same phonological system as its close relative Georgian, but with a series of underlying geminates which undergo degemination and fortition in onsets. Since no other apparent cases of coda neutralization in favor of marked feature values have been found, it seems that the markedness asymmetry in coda neutralization is exceptionless, hence a true universal.

Independent support is that the same asymmetry arises in other ways than by the sound change of coda devoicing; e.g. in Konni, voicing assimilation is blocked just when it would voice a coda, in which case a vowel is epenthesized instead (Cahill 1999). Further evidence comes from TETU effects and from coda devoicing in young children (Smith 1973, Ingram 1976, Yavas 1994).

(ii) I make a parallel case for stress/weight solidarity. Specifically, I provide evidence that the generalization that stress seeks heavy syllables and sonorous vowels, as defined by the familiar sonority scale (de Lacy 2002) is a true universal by each of the above criteria.