

## Introducing Comparative Concepts

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Cross-linguistic comparison is challenging due to the great diversity of the morphosyntactic structures of grammatical constructions across language. This issue is central to typological theory, which seeks patterns across language diversity. As such, typological thinking about cross-linguistic comparison may be useful to alignment of constructions across languages, the goal of this workshop.

Typologists have seen the need for comparative concepts since at least the beginning of modern syntactic typology (Greenberg 1966), although this term was not coined until Haspelmath (2010). From Greenberg onward, the primary type of comparative concepts were semantic, or more broadly, functional. Haspelmath argued for the need for comparative concepts that combined functional and formal traits. Croft (2014, 2016, 2022) identifies two types of “hybrid” comparative concepts. A construction is the set of all structures in any language that express a particular function. A strategy is the subset of all structures in any language that express a particular function using a particular form.

Comparative concepts are hence different theoretical concepts from language-specific grammatical constructions and categories. There is skepticism over whether comparative concepts and language-specific concepts are really that different. However, such skepticism is grounded in assumptions about the nature of language universals (the skeleton model), grammatical constructions (the building block model) and grammatical categories (the essentialist model), all of which should be discarded.

Comparative concepts and language-specific concepts do share an important element, namely function. Function is best understood as the combination of semantic content and information packaging (Croft 1991, 2001, 2022). Recognizing these two dimensions of function allow us to develop coherent typological theories of grammatical categories and constructions.

Language-specific constructions can also be categorized in terms of their strategies. There are three broad categories of strategies. An encoding strategy is a particular morphosyntactic means for expressing a function, e.g. an inflected copula. A system of strategies is defined by similarities and differences between strategies of two or more constructions, e.g. ergative alignment. A recruitment strategy uses the form of another construction expressing a related function, e.g. a locational strategy to express presentation possession. All strategies are ultimately recruitment: a form is recruited for a new function, and then the source and target constructions diverge to become distinct encoding strategies (or part of a new system of strategies). Hence there is a continuum between different types of strategies.

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