

Variability of Languages in Time and Space (NPFL150)
Inventory of possible questions for the final written test, 2025/26

**BASIC FACTS ON LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY, GENETIC CLASSIFICATION OF
LANGUAGES, AREAL LINGUISTICS**

1. What is meant by linguistic typology and how does it differ from genetic classification of languages?
2. What is areal linguistics? How is it different from genealogical classification?
3. How can similarities among languages arise that are not due to genetic relationship? Give at least two mechanisms.
4. How does the typological approach help in documenting and comparing endangered or under-documented languages? What are its limitations?
5. What role do cross-linguistic databases (e.g., phonological inventories) play in typological research? Why are they important? What risks and limitations are there?
6. How can typology inform computational linguistics (e.g., multilingual NLP, morphological analysis, building corpora)?

LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY OF PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY

7. What is the difference between phonetics and phonology? Provide two examples.
8. Consonant inventories: How and why do they differ between languages?
9. Vowel inventories: How and why do they differ between languages?
10. What cross-linguistic patterns can be observed in vowel inventories?
11. What is the smallest number of vowels that a language can have? In languages with very small vowel inventories, which phonemic vowel distinctions tend to be preserved?
12. What may be the highest possible number of vowels in a language? What makes the numbers higher?
13. Which factors influence the size of a language's phoneme inventory?

14. Give two examples from a language you speak that illustrate segmental processes such as assimilation, dissimilation, or other phonological alternations. Describe what the process is and how it operates.

LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY OF MORPHOLOGY

15. What is a linguistic sign in the context of morphology? What are the two components of a sign according to classical linguistic theory? Give examples.
16. What is the distinction between lexical and grammatical meaning in morphology? Give examples.
17. Define and contrast the agglutinating morphological type. Give examples.
18. Define and contrast the fusional morphological type. Give examples.
19. Define and contrast the isolating morphological type. Give examples.
20. Define and contrast the polysynthetic morphological type. Give examples.
21. What are the limits or challenges of classifying languages strictly into these morphology types? Are there languages that resist clear classification? Give examples.
22. Why is the distinction between parts of speech (e.g., noun vs. verb vs. adjective) considered relative rather than absolute in some languages? Give examples or describe scenarios.
23. Describe the grammatical categories of nouns commonly found across languages.
24. Give examples (real or hypothetical) of how two languages with very different morphological types can encode the same meaning (e.g., plurality, possession, definiteness).

LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY OF WORD-FORMATION

25. List three different types of morphemes that are used in word-formation and illustrate each with examples from two languages.
26. How can the creation of the English noun 'improvement' be modeled in word-formation?
27. In which word-formation process are no word-formation morphemes added? Give an example.

28. What is the difference between the word-formation processes called compounding and blending? Give an example for each process.
29. Which word-formation process has been identified in existing typological research as the most frequent across languages?
30. Explain why the following triplets of words are similar across languages:
- Czech 'bučet' (En. 'to moo') - French 'beugler' (En. 'to moo') - Turkish 'böğürme' (En. 'to moo')
 - Italian 'padre' (En. 'father') - Spanish 'padre' (En. 'father') - French 'père' (En. 'father')
 - Czech 'identita' - English 'identity' - Basque 'identitate'

LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY OF SYNTAX

31. What simplifications have been used when comparing the syntactic structure of languages in linguistic typology?
32. Which type of basic word order is, according to current sources, the most common in natural languages?
33. Why do the latest data-based studies suggest abandoning separate categories when describing word order across languages and working with scales instead?
34. State and explain one linguistic universal you know. Illustrate the universal with examples from two languages (including translations into English if another language is chosen).

WRITING SYSTEMS

35. What is the difference between a logographic writing system and a phonographic writing system? Give one example of each.
36. Explain the main distinction between an abugida and an abjad. Provide one language that uses each type.
37. What are the key characteristics of a featural writing system? Name the best-known example.
38. Describe the three scripts used in Japanese writing. What role does each script play?
39. What is the difference between a script and a writing system? Provide an example where the same script is used by multiple writing systems.

40. Why is Hangul considered one of the most scientifically designed writing systems?
41. How does directionality vary among world writing systems? Give at least two examples of different writing directions.
42. Explain how the Latin alphabet evolved historically from earlier scripts. Mention at least two intermediate stages.
43. Explain how syllabaries differ from alphabets in terms of symbol-to-sound mapping. Why do some languages prefer syllabaries?

DATA RESOURCES FOR TYPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

44. Describe the structure of the WALS database. Give at least three examples of WALS features.
45. Give at least one example of data resources from which one derives whether two words are related etymologically.
46. What are typical disadvantages of currently existing massively multilingual parallel corpora?
47. Explain the notion of cognate.
48. Give at least two examples of attempts at creating standardized lists of languages.
49. Why is ISO 639-1 (two-letter code identifiers) insufficient for the world's languages?
50. Describe a few main properties of Glottolog.
51. Give an example of a multilingual morphological database and describe its main properties.
52. What is Swadesh list?