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## STUDY OF THE AMBIGUITY OF THE CONCEPT OF “UNIVERSAL” IN LINGUISTICS: ASPECTS AND DEFINITION

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the ambiguity of the concept of “universal” in linguistics, taking into account three main aspects: the variability of the scope of language phenomena, the mixing of epistemological and ontological approaches, as well as the understanding of universality in the context of comparing different languages. Based on a critical review of existing definitions and taking into account various types of universal phenomena, a new formulation of the concept of “linguistic universals” is proposed, which emphasizes their role and function in human society.

### KEYWORDS

Universal, linguistics, concept, linguistic properties, variability, epistemology, ontology, comparison of languages, analysis, definition.

### INTRODUCTION

Language universals are common features or patterns that characterize language systems as a whole or groups of languages. These universals can relate to various aspects of language, including phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics and others.

The idea of linguistic universals comes from the branch of linguistics known as universal grammar. It is assumed that there are certain basic elements and patterns that are common to all languages. Thus, by studying these universals, linguists seek to identify common principles underlying all languages, regardless of their specific structure or origin. “The

only useful generalizations concerning language are inductive generalizations” (Bloomfield, Language, 1933, p. 20).

This statement is significant because our goal is not to create linguistic universalities, but to discover them. However, the method of detection remains unclear. It would be fair to say that the goals pursued in the search for universals coincide with the general goals of linguistics in at least two aspects. First, this is true heuristically: we cannot be sure that the analysis of any aspect of language will not lead to the discovery of something essential to the search for universals. Secondly, this assumption of plausibility (if not inevitable truth) is confirmed when we accept one of the possible definitions of linguistics as the science concerned with determining the place of human language in the world. As C. F. Hockett argues, this formulation leaves the problem of universals as vague as the general problems of linguistics. The search for linguistic universals and the determination of the place of human language in the universe are difficult to discern in any discernible way. Rather, they are two ways of describing the same thing - modern and old-fashioned.

Examples of linguistic universals may include such phenomena as the presence of sound configurations, the expression of relations of time and space, the existence of agreement between different elements of a sentence, etc. The study of these universals helps

linguists understand the general principles of language functioning and the differences between different languages.

The problem of universals in linguistics is a controversial issue about the existence and nature of general patterns that can be applied to all languages. This problem arises from the question of how universal certain linguistic structures and patterns are, and how much they are determined by the innate properties of human language.

There are several points of view on this problem:

1. Universals exist: Some linguists believe that there are common features or patterns that are present in all languages, and that these universals can be explained in terms of universal grammar or other theories. They assume that there are general constraints that determine the possible variations of language systems.
2. Lack of universals: Other linguists deny the existence of universal linguistic patterns or believe that such universals can be very limited and specific. They emphasize the diversity of language systems and argue that diversity is more important than commonality.
3. Limited Universals: Some linguists agree that there are some universals, but they argue that these universals relate to particular aspects of language or language typology, rather than to the language system as a whole.

The debate around the problem of universals is important for the development of linguistics because it influences our understanding of how languages work and the way we study language systems. Solving this problem has implications not only for theoretical linguistics, but also for applications in machine translation, language teaching, and other areas where language plays a key role.

The definition of linguistic universals must be based on both a process of extrapolation and an analysis of empirical data.

Extrapolation, or inference, allows you to generalize known phenomena to unknown areas based on logical reasoning and assumptions. This approach helps linguists identify general patterns and trends that may apply to many languages. For example, if in most languages there is a distinction between verbs and nouns, then we can conclude that this is a universal linguistic feature.

However, extrapolation may not be sufficient without support from empirical data obtained from observations and analysis of specific languages. Empirical evidence provides linguists with specific examples and contexts in which linguistic phenomena occur. This material allows you to confirm or refute hypotheses formulated on the basis of extrapolation and clarify general patterns.

Thus, the establishment of linguistic universals requires a combination of theoretical conclusions based on extrapolation and analysis of empirical material to confirm these conclusions in practice.

As C. F. Hockett argues, a feature may be widespread or even universal among languages, but this does not necessarily mean that it is essential or fundamental to the language system.

The essential features of a language determine its basic structure and functioning. They are usually key to understanding the language as a whole. For example, the distinction between nouns and verbs, as well as the ability to express temporal relations, are essential features of language.

However, there are also features that may be widespread, but are not essential in the sense of the defining structure of the language. For example, the presence of certain phonetic features in a language may be widespread among many languages, but this is not a necessary condition for the existence of the language or the definition of its basic characteristics.

Thus, it is important to distinguish between widespread or universal features of a language and those that are truly essential to its structure and functioning. This helps to better understand the basic principles of the language and its diversity.

A universal attribute has more reason to be considered essential if there are communication systems (especially non-human ones) that do not possess it. When a universal feature is not present in other communication systems, this may indicate its importance for the human language system. If a feature is widespread or universal among human languages and is absent in other communication systems, especially non-humans, this may indicate that it is important and essential to the language.

For example, the ability to think abstractly and express abstract concepts through language is a universal feature of human languages. While there is no convincing evidence that other animals or other communication systems, such as animal communication or artificial languages, have this ability to the same extent or in the same format, it can be assumed that it is an essential feature of human language.

The presence of elements that are not always common in the universals of a language, caused by the diversity of the language system and the restrictions imposed on universals by various processes in the field of language, is quite natural and shows that universals can have exceptions. This, however, does not detract from their importance, especially considering that when studying universal characteristics, linguists usually limit themselves to studying a limited number of languages, and there is always the potential to find

cases that contradict these universals. “Thus, even though units in different languages may have common features, upon closer analysis significant differences are revealed.”

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the ambiguity in the interpretation of the concept of “universal” stems, first of all, from the variability of the coverage of language phenomena, secondly, from the confusion of epistemological and ontological aspects when considering universal linguistic properties, and, thirdly, from the understanding of universality not as a community of certain linguistic phenomena, but as an opportunity to compare different languages with each other or with some standard language. Based on a critical analysis of the existing definitions of linguistic universals, as well as taking into account various types of universal phenomena, we propose the following formulation of the concept under study: “Language universals are categories, patterns and structural attributes of language that perform the same functions in human society.”

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