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The unabashed typologist: A Frans Plank Schubertiade

Preface

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It is a great pleasure to offer the present volume of some of the best papers of our dear friend and colleague Frans Plank, in commemoration of the 21 years he has served as founding editor of our journal, *Linguistic Typology*. When Uri Tadmor originally brought up the idea of a celebratory volume, we immediately contacted a number of leading scholars, colleagues, and friends of Frans, who we knew would rush to honor him and recognize the extensive contributions he has made to the field in so many ways. Although we did briefly consider soliciting original papers to honor him, we then imagined how Frans would evaluate them in order to earn his own imprimatur: “accept with minor revisions”, “accept with major revisions”, “not in the remit of this volume” etc. We realized that what we really wanted to do was to assemble—and reread—Frans’s own great work which has so inspired the four of us and countless others. We added to this the decision to invite colleagues who have interacted with him in the typological sphere to submit their own statements of appreciation for the scholar and the person. We were delighted to receive the 20 contributions that precede the six articles we chose which reflect some of his best work, all of it sanctioned by the supportive De Gruyter Mouton Publishers. The outpouring of thoughtful and personal testimonials we received cover

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such a wide range of recognizable reactions and citations of Frans's scholarship, historical knowledge, intellectual leadership, humor, and lovable quirkiness that we feel it necessary to plagiarize and cite from these letters in this brief preface to the volume.

As readers less close to our honoree will quickly observe, Frans is well known for his abilities to identify important questions and see to it that the appropriate issues are addressed both by himself and by others. His long publication record attests to his own originality and impact on different areas of the modern field of linguistic typology, of which he is also one of a handful of founders and major movers. Whether working on ergativity, double case, grammatical relations, paradigms, universals or linguistic rarities, whether drawing from his extensive expertise in Germanic linguistics or from Kayardild, Maasai or other more distant languages, Frans's work is always important, original, and thought-provoking.

Those of us contributing to this tribute also know Frans for his wonderful wit, his critical sense, and his erudition. As several of his colleagues also note in their praise, it is largely through Frans's efforts and writings that names such as Georg von der Gabelentz are known to a wider audience, e.g., to members of the Association for Linguistic Typology which offers an award in his name. We also know Frans from a number of important events in the history of linguistic typology. Along with the late Simon Dik, Ekkehard König, Paolo Ramat and others, Frans was a major figure in the European Science Foundation-funded EURO TYP project, which supported nine working groups addressing the typology of European (and other) languages. Frans was in charge of the working group on Noun Phrase Structure. The first author recalls first seeing Frans as the imposing red-headed figure that rose to ask a penetrating question of a plenary speaker at the 1991 EURO TYP meeting in Il Ciocco, March 22–24, 1991. The second author was in Frans's group and contributed three chapters to the volume that emerged at the end of the project—see Plank (2002).

Shortly after that Frans was the main initiator of the Association for Linguistic Typology, hosting a pre-inaugural get-together at his long-time academic home in Konstanz in November 1994. The following year saw the first meeting (ALT I) in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the Basque Country, Spain in November 1995 and planning of the new journal, *Linguistic Typology* with the crucial guidance of Anke Beck, who had just joined Mouton de Gruyter, and who continued her hands-on support of the journal for more than a decade until assuming her current Managing Director position at De Gruyter. The first issue of *LT* appeared in 1997.

Several of the laudatio writers also were participants in establishing ALT and LT and/or have served as officers, committee members, and associate editors over the past 21 years. During his editorship the association, the journal, and the field of linguistic typology have all flourished and prospered from Frans's multiple contributions. Besides his publications, editorial activities, and organized workshops, Frans's intellectual leadership includes the establishment of two extremely useful databases: As of this writing, The Konstanz Universals Archive includes 2029 claimed universals, carefully referenced along with Frans's comments about the (non-)validity of each (<https://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro/index.php>). At the other extreme, Das Grammatische Raritätenkabinett (<https://typo.uni-konstanz.de/rara/intro/index.php>) consists of "a collection of things, living or more often dead, which are considered valuable, or at any rate worth collecting and perhaps exhibiting, because they are rare—not such things, though, whose commodity or exchange value would grow with rareness, but ones whose very existence, contrary to experience or indeed reason, makes the beholder marvel at the design of the universe." An inspiration for Cysouw and Wohlgemuth (2010), at this writing 147 such rarities appear in the database.

In recognition of Frans Plank's many activities and contributions to the field, and with the support of Uri Tadmor, Rebecca Walter and others at De Gruyter Mouton, the four of us consulted and chose six of his published "must read" De Gruyter Mouton articles that highlight the kind of work that he does. The result is the following table of contents, which we briefly introduce here:

1. Plank, Frans & Aditi Lahiri. 2015. Macroscopic and microscopic typology: Basic Valence Orientation, more pertinacious than meets the naked eye. *Linguistic Typology* 19(1). 1–54.

In this paper the authors present a comprehensive scholarly account of subsegmental morphology (ablaut, umlaut) in the German verb and its consequences both for typology (generalizations concerning whether a language is basically transitivizing vs. detransitivizing) and diachrony ("pertinacity" re the claim that strong verbs are basic and weak verbs derived). The authors show that in causative-alternation pairs with a weak verb and a strong verb, the strong one is almost always derived. In pairs with a plain vowel vs. umlaut, the verb with umlaut is usually derived. These very strong tendencies shed light on the morphological typology of German. The paper is original, wide-ranging and data rich.

2. Plank, Frans. 2008. Thoughts on the origin, progress, and pronominal status of reciprocal forms in Germanic, occasioned by those of Bavarian. In Ekkehard König & Volker Gast (eds.), *Reciprocals and reflexives: Cross-linguistic and theoretical explorations*, 347–374. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

The typology of reciprocals has received a lot of attention for years. Plank (2008) reveals novel aspects of reciprocals, both from a typological point of view and how diachrony can affect them. Reciprocals can be nominal/pronominal or adverbial. From a typological perspective, the nominal/pronominal aspect focuses on the referential side of reciprocity and the adverbials focus on the role-reversal component of the same. From a diachronic perspective, reciprocal status can change. In older Germanic languages, reciprocals were originally nominal; for instance, in the oldest Old English examples we find instances of phrases such as ‘*earl killed earl*’ (not ‘each other’). In terms of change, Frans notes that probably the most advanced stage within Germanic is reflected in Bavarian where the reciprocals have become adverbials; for instance, they are not used in argument position. Meaning can also be slightly different. Thus, it is entirely possible for a nominal/pronominal reciprocal to become adverbial.

3. Plank, Frans. 2007. Extent and limits of linguistic diversity as the remit of typology – but through constraints on what is diversity limited? *Linguistic Typology* 11(1). 43–68.

This paper is a call to arms, or at least eyes and ears. The first published typological findings, beginning nearly 400 years ago in 1638, were falsifications of then-received views on universal grammar, were stated in terms of pure structure and not its motivation (functional, cognitive, etc.), and are storable as implicational laws. They still stand. Today’s typologist (in this case Frans), looking just a bit closely, sees many cases where a clear universal can be stated in terms of abstract or underlying structure and only its accommodation in language-specific surface constraints involves such motivation. Examples from phonology alone, with their discussion, occupy 10 pages: infixation (abstract prefixation or suffixation, accommodating articulatory constraints on clusters as in Tagalog), extrametricality, catalexis, ... From syntax, linear ordering of adjectives and adjective-like modifiers in NP’s is neatly and universally determined at an abstract level by scope and conceptual nouniness, and adjusted by fronting to accommodate iconicity, topicality, etc.; the abstract representations, at an

even more abstract level and expressible only there, may turn out to cover both NP and clause ordering. These abstract solutions immediately raise many interesting questions for high-impact typological research that can bring typology and other, currently distanced, subfields together. Typologists of the world: Listen up!

4. Plank, Frans. 2003. The selective elaboration of nominal or pronominal inflection. In Frans Plank (ed.), *Noun phrase structure in the languages of Europe*, 253–287. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Using a database drawing on the pioneering Forchheimer 1953 and later sources, this paper shows that there are few solid generalizations to be made about what typological properties of languages presuppose, imply, or otherwise correlate with the presence of duals (and further elaborated number categories), inclusive, and proximity distinctions in demonstratives – unless they are separately tracked for nouns vs. pronouns, in which case clear skewings emerge. For instance, little can be said about whether having a dual favors more proximity distinctions, but a dual in pronouns correlates with more proximity distinctions, while a dual in nouns correlates with fewer. A number of other such implicational statements are presented, as well as some individual tendencies (for instance, duals in nouns are often optional and/or limited to only some subsets of nouns such as natural pairs, while duals of pronouns are usually obligatory and unlimited). The paper sketches a plan for researching a likely diachronic explanation for these correlations and for the curious position of Europe in the relevant typological space. In the 15 years that have intervened, we have developed a better genealogical classification of languages, theoretical understanding of how to use family surveys to demonstrate universals, statistical tools and ready-to-go packages, and a burgeoning quantity of new and improved grammars, making a detailed cross-family and intra-family survey possible. But no such study, despite Frans's clear call for one in this paper (and similar calls in other papers). Is anyone out there? Is anyone listening?

5. Plank, Frans. 1999. Split morphology: How agglutination and flexion mix. *Linguistic Typology* 3(3). 279–340.

This paper is the first serious study of the classic morphological typological ideals of agglutinative vs. flexive, and still the only comprehensive one. The ideals have, as the paper notes, probably never been espoused as actual regular types rather than ideals, but in their ideal forms they are eminently testable hypotheses. The

paper breaks the ideals down into their simplest components (separative vs. cumulative and variant vs. invariant morphs) and surveys a great many languages to determine whether the homogeneous vs. heterogeneous poles tend to occur anywhere, and if so in what categories, lexical classes, etc. The huge variety of attested patterns seems to defy systematization, but what does have recurrent systematicity is the dividing lines between them, notably grammatical vs. semantic cases and more generally unmarked vs. marked categories. E.g., cumulative can be associated with either variant (flexive) or invariant (agglutinative), but invariant is found chiefly in marked categories such as semantic cases and past tense. The combination of cumulative and invariant is heterogeneous, and it occurs in marked categories. The reason for this division of labor is that complexity (here, morphological variance) tends to be disfavored in already complex contexts (here, marked categories). Is it timeless implicational laws or regular developments in diachrony that explain the observed tendencies? Probably both; the paper gives a range of possible evidence and some possible ways of testing for it and ends on a call for tests of whether diachronic changes affecting members of a subsystem tend to occur together and in the same direction, sending a grammar through a progression of stages — i.e., whether changes are synchronized and therefore produce Greenberg’s dynamicization of typology. Now we are at last in a position to do much larger surveys and determine which of these patterns are significant. The survey of paradigms would be labor-intensive but is feasible. We also have tools to detect favored diachronies and favored outcomes, testing the universality of any patterns that emerge as significant. But to our knowledge we do not yet have exemplar studies and tools to determine whether sets of changes, sets of outcomes, sets of contexts, and sets of implicational correlations themselves covary. So, nearly 20 years later, we could replicate and expand Frans’s survey and identify its significant components, but we are not yet geared up to look into covariance as he proposed, and that will reveal the most interesting universals of all.

6. Plank, Frans. 1998. The co-variation of phonology with morphology and syntax: A hopeful history. *Linguistic Typology* 2(2). 195–230.

In this paper Frans addresses the long-standing question of whether claimed “holistic” typological dependencies between syntax, morphology and phonology successfully correlate. Documenting the numerous such claims that have been advanced over the last 250+ years, Frans takes us through an impressive array of views starting in the eighteenth century, e.g., the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1771: “Words tend to be longer than one syllable in transpositive [free word order] languages and to be monosyllabic in analogous [rigid word

order] languages” (Plank 1998: 198). While the search continued through many others, including Charles Bally, Vladimir Skalička, Winfred Lehmann, Wolfgang Dressler, Patricia Donegan and David Stampe, Rebecca Dauer, David Gil, Peter Auer — all carefully referenced by Frans who evaluates the evidence for such correlations. Plank (1998) is still the standard reference on this longstanding typological enterprise.

More on Frans Plank the linguist, the editor, and the person can be enjoyed in the 20 laudatorios on the following pages. It is hard, indeed impossible to summarize our own feelings and appreciation towards Frans. Each of the four of us has chosen to make a brief tribute and thanks to him below:

Frans, you have been an inspiration to me: our many talks about linguistics, opera, Lieder, and life; reading your stimulating work and voluminous emails; and spending great times together in Konstanz, Oxford, London, Berkeley—and most recently Bavaria, including “das wahrscheinlich beste Weissbier der Welt” from Brauerei Jacob in Regensburg! Looking forward to more linguistics, music, and good times together, I wish you a self-rewarding and joyful post-editorship! (Larry)

Frans, I owe you so much – intellectually and emotionally, professionally and personally. Your letter with an invitation to join the Noun Phrase Structure Group within EUROTYP and my first trip to the group meeting in Konstanz accompanied by the three-month-old baby belong to my life’s most changing experiences. So much we have shared – Noun Phrase, Suffixaufnahme and temperature, Traffic Lights Café and Jimmie’s, Das Spiel auf dem See, walking in the Alps, watching films and listening to music in your apartment. And, most importantly, meeting many wonderful people. It is a privilege to have been a part of your editorial team for *Linguistic Typology*. And as your successor I have very big shoes to step into! (Masha)

Frans, from voicing neutralisation to geminates, clitics and prosody, heads and non-heads, particles and prepositions, classifiers and determiners, in Bavarian and elsewhere – your influence continues to be an inspiration. (Aditi)

Frans, thanks for so much including building our field; for running the tightest ship in the editorial business, watching over form and style and copy-editing like a hawk and doing a lot of hands-on copy editing yourself, making it clear from the very first issue that *LT* is a first-class journal taking its mission very seriously; and always citing the earliest antecedents in your own work and reminding us authors of earlier work, keeping the work of our intellectual ancestors alive and relevant and keeping all of us aware of our origins and heritage. For noticing things no one else noticed, and giving them definitive

analyses. And for many important books and papers going well beyond the ones that could be included here. (Johanna)

Acknowledgements: Thank you, Frans, for all of the intellectual stimulation and for enriching our lives in general.

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Participants at the Workshop on Asymmetries and Universals in honor of Frans Plank's 60th Birthday, May 24, 2009.