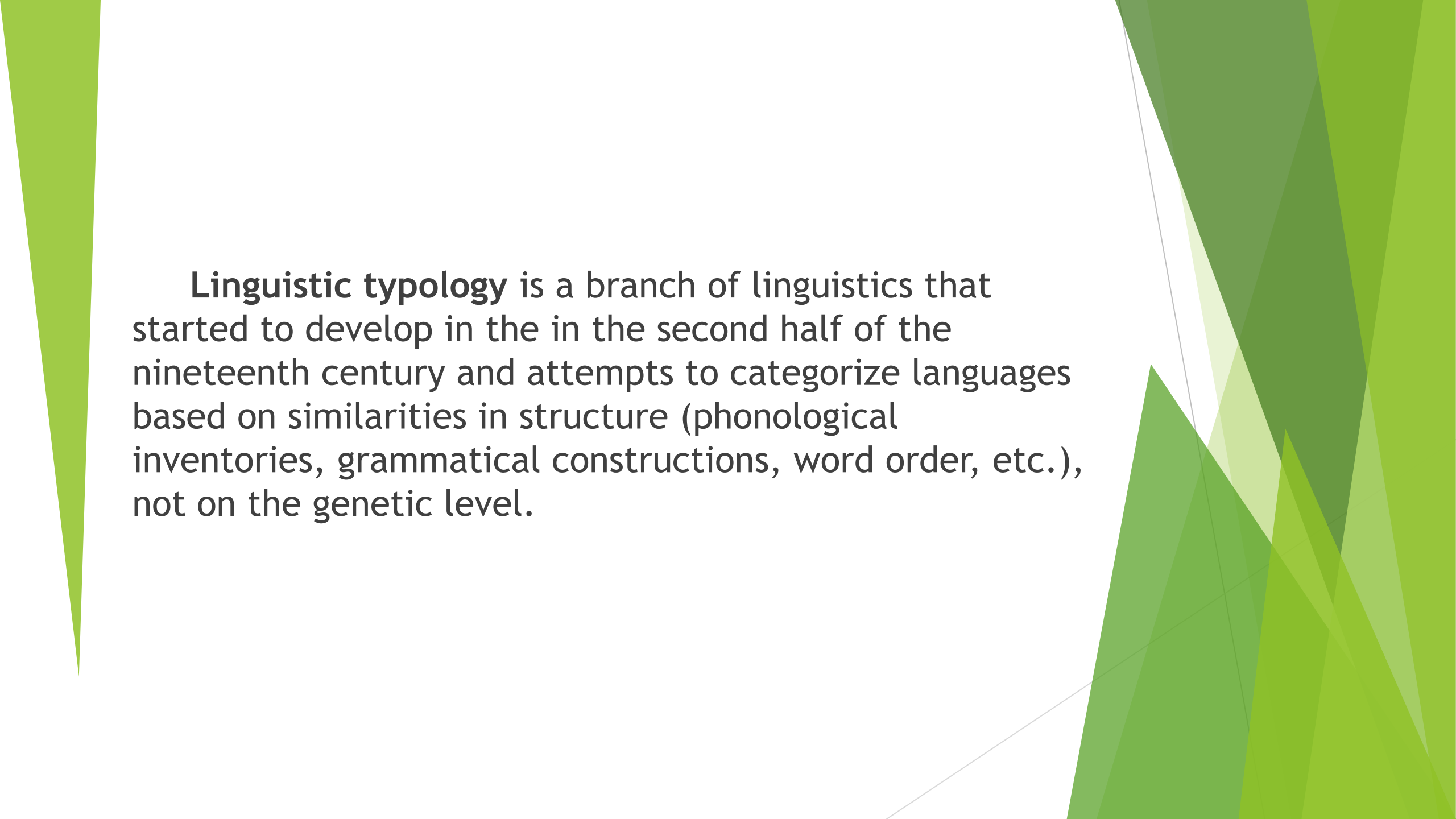# Typological classification of languages

Shlm-501

Dzhagaeva Ulyana
Sou Amadu
Farkhutdinova Sofia

Linguistic typology is a branch of linguistics that started to develop in the in the second half of the nineteenth century and attempts to categorize languages based on similarities in structure (phonological inventories, grammatical constructions, word order, etc.), not on the genetic level.

Morphological types across the world's languages

Linguists can categorize languages based on their word-building properties and usage of different affixation processes

The broadest distinction among languages is whether or not affixation is allowed at all, or if every word must be a single morpheme

For languages that allow affixation, we can further categorize these according to their morphological characteristics.

Analytic and Isolating Languages

- *Analytic* languages have sentences composed entirely of *free* morphemes, where each word consists of *only one morpheme*

- *Isolating* languages are "purely analytic" and allow no affixation (inflectional or derivational) at all. Sometimes *analytic* languages allow some derivational morphology such as compounds (two free roots in a single word)

- A canonically analytic language is Mandarin Chinese. Note that properties such as "plural" and "past" comprise their own morphemes and their own words:

三天 (sān tiān)   我喜欢看书 — Wǒ xǐhuān kànshū

Three day (Three days)   I be fond read book (*I like reading (books)*

Synthetic Languages

► Synthetic languages allow affixation such that words may (though are not required to) include two or more morphemes. These languages have *bound morphemes*, meaning they must be attached to another word (whereas analytic languages only have free morphemes)

► Synthetic languages include three subcategories: agglutinative, fusional, and polysynthetic.

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                              _____
                             /                        \
                  Analytical /                        Synthetic
                  Isolating                          /    |    \
                                                     /     |     \
                                        Agglutinative  Fusional  Polysynthetic
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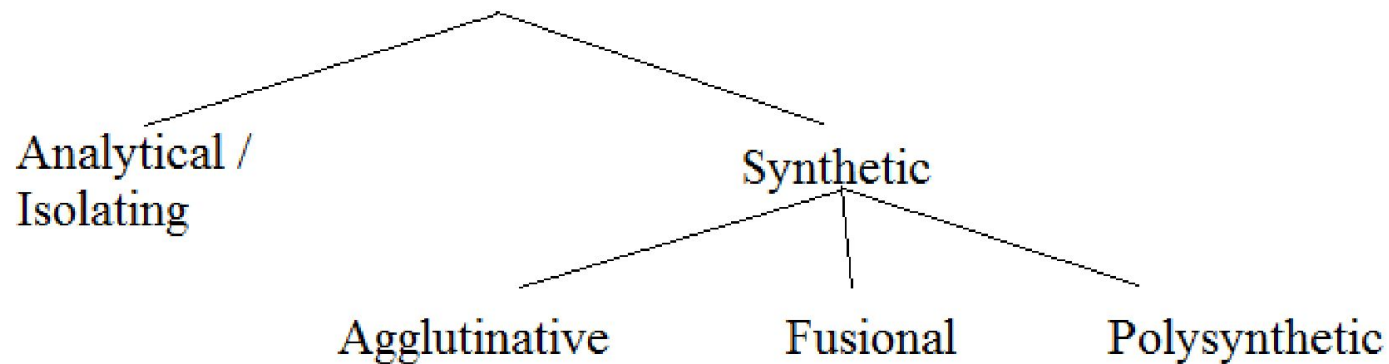
Agglutinative Type

► Agglutinative languages have words which may consist of more than one, and possibly many, morphemes

► The key characteristic separating agglutinative languages from other synthetic languages is that morphemes within words are easily parsed or "loosely" arranged; the morpheme boundaries are easy to identify

► We often use the metaphor "beads on a string" to describe agglutinative languages.

Agglutinative languages

Examples of canonical agglutinative languages include Turkish, Swahili, Hungarian

- ► el-ler-imiz-in (Turkish)

- ► ni-na-soma(Swahili)

- ► I-present-read'I am reading'

- ► (also u-na-soma 'you read,' ni-li-soma 'I read,' etc.)

Fusional type

- Fusional languages, like other synthetic languages, may have more than one morpheme per word

- However, fusional languages may have morphemes that combine multiple pieces of grammatical information; that is, there is not a clear 1 to 1 relationship between grammatical information and morphemes

- For example, in Spanish:

- [ˈabl-o] 'I am speaking' -[o] suffix means 1st person sng., present tense

- [ˈabl-a] 's/he is speaking' -[a] suffix means 3rd person sng. present tense

- [abl-ˈo] 's/he spoke'-[ˈo] suffix with stress means 3rd singular past tense

Polysynthetic type

- Polysynthetic languages often display a high degree of affixation (high number of morphemes per word) and fusion of morphemes, like agglutinative and fusional languages

- Additionally, however, polysynthetic languages may have words with **multiple stems in a single word** (which are not compounds). This may be achieved by incorporating the subject and object nouns into complex verb forms

For example:

- anin-ɲam-jɔ-te-n (Sora)

- 'He is fish-catching' - this is called *noun incorporation*, where the object 'fish' is incorporated in the verb 'catch.'

Some of the most extreme examples come from Eskimo languages such as West Greenlandic:

- tusaa-nngit-su-usaar-tuaannar-sinnaa-nngi-vip-putit

Phonological typology: vocalic and consonantal languages

► According to the phonological classification languages can be **vocalic and consonantal.**

► Some languages are more vocalic and others are more consonantal.

	Vowels	Consonants
French	45,5%	54,5%
Polish	22,8%	77,2%
Caucasian languages	4,3%	95,7%

► The relation in the basic (hypothetical) system is as follows: 30% of vowels to 70% consonants.

Syntactic typology

► One of the most common ways of classifying languages is by the most typical order of the subject (S), verb (V) and object (O) in sentences such as "The cat eats the mouse":

SVO ("The cat eats the mouse"),

SOV ("The cat the mouse eats"),

VSO ("Eats the cat the mouse"),

OSV ("The mouse the cat eats"),

OVS ("The mouse eats the cat"),

VOS ("Eats the mouse the cat").