

Review of *Phonological Typology*. By Matthew K. Gordon. (Oxford Surveys in Phonology and Phonetics). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. ix, 363. ISBN 978-0-19-966901-1 (pbk).

Author: Paul V. de Lacy

Affiliation: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Email: delacy@rutgers.edu

Mailing Address:

Linguistics Department

Rutgers University

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

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Reviewed by PAUL V. DE LACY, *Rutgers University*

Gordon's *Phonological Typology* (PT) is a survey of the cross-linguistic variation found in selected phonological phenomena. There is an emphasis throughout on explaining such variation, resulting in a book that is highly theoretically informed. There are also many discussions of within-language frequency of phonological categories – something rarely found in work of this type. Overall, PT is a masterful work, written by a highly qualified author: Gordon has many publications in theoretical phonology, and has presented extensive typological research as evidence for his theories.

It is important to say what PT is not. It does not propose any new theories, and it is not a textbook. PT is also not a handbook – it does not provide deep exploration of individual topics. Instead, PT bridges the gap between a textbook and a handbook; it provides an overview of topics, and serves as a jumping-off point for deeper study in either handbooks or original sources. Accordingly, much of the book presupposes a strong foundation in phonological theory, so undergraduates would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the discussions without help. While it is a survey, PT is not merely a catalogue of generalizations. There is continual emphasis on explanation, and on the many sources of explanation for typological asymmetries, with an excellent overview in ch.2. PT presents constant reminders that theories play a necessary role in typological exploration.

PT also has a social goal: to encourage better communication between typologists and theoretical phonologists. Over the past three decades, a great deal of work in theoretical phonology has involved typological research, often driven by predictions of proposals expressed in Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky 2004). At the same time, phonology has been less prominent among typologists, leading to what Gordon calls “the impoverished position of phonology in typology” (p.5; see also Hyman 2007). PT provides a way for typologists to gain quick insight into the cross-linguistic variation of many phonological phenomena, as well as to understand theoreticians’

motivations for their typological work. In a sense, PT is a theoretician reaching out to typologists. To a lesser extent, it also encourages theoreticians to take note of work in typology; PT discusses many databases and descriptions that will help inform theoretical work. On the other hand, PT does not provide extensive discussion of the methods used by typologists in their work – not even on such basic issues as how to provide a balanced sample of languages in a typology, and how such balancing might be relevant to theoreticians. So, while PT is a bridge between typologists and theoreticians, it is mainly one-way.

I believe PT will be at its most useful in advanced undergraduate phonology classes and introductory graduate courses. The chapters cover syllables, segmental processes, stress, tone and intonation, and prosodic morphology. All presuppose familiarity with fundamental phonological concepts; some basic information is provided, but it is rather telegraphic (e.g. the one page introduction to the syllable – pp.83-4). In other words, students should be provided with a strong understanding of the syllable before tackling PT's 'syllable' chapter, and the same advice applies for every other chapter in the book. Each chapter is fairly self-contained, and so they could be profitably assigned as individual readings. For the student, the value of each chapter is that it provides a high-level overview of broad topics, but with enough depth to identify interesting aspects, and adequate references to launch the student towards deeper exploration.

A great strength of the book is its focus on within-language frequency. For example, there is discussion of the within-language relative frequency of short vs. long vowels, singleton vs. geminate consonants, geminate consonants of various manners of articulation, syllable types, and many others (pp.52ff). It is rare to see such within-language relative frequencies discussed, even though – as Gordon notes – they often follow the same patterns as found cross-linguistically.

Any survey faces a basic conundrum: breadth or depth? In terms of breadth, I feel that the chapters cover a very sensible range of topics. From a practical point of view, they are all areas where much work has been done, making it possible to discuss cross-linguistic variation and even within-language frequency. On the other hand, Gordon expresses some regret at not covering more, such as loanwords and first language acquisition (p. 303), and there is no discussion of the types of diachronic phonological change. Sadly, such is the nature of surveys, but in this case I do not see how any better coverage could have been achieved in the space available. Inevitably, then, lecturers should plan to supplement any chapters assigned from PT with additional information.

In terms of depth, it is important to again emphasize that PT is a survey. Some topics are covered in good detail (e.g. assimilation – pp. 123-141). However, others are discussed only very briefly (e.g. consonant epenthesis). The reader is often introduced to theoretical and empirical controversies, but not provided with in-depth evaluations (e.g. the controversy over which consonants can be epenthetic – pp. 166-167). Similarly, PT does not aim to provide a comprehensive comparison of theories, so again any chapter assigned as a course reading would have to be supplemented by additional instruction. Theoretically, PT does convey two points very well. One is that theories are the source of explanation in typology. The other is that there are many theoretical disagreements and controversies (e.g. failure of the moraic uniformity hypothesis – p.269; processes that apparently create ill-formed syllables – pp.107-8), and that there is much yet to discover (p.303).

One of the most satisfying aspects of the book is the continual emphasis on the ‘why’ of typological patterns. PT is not a mere catalogue of empirical generalizations; there is a pervasive focus on understanding the motivations – both cognitive and extra-cognitive – behind typological asymmetries. In fact, the discussion of every topic follows the same rhythm: empirical generalizations, followed by theoretical concepts, and an attempt to link the two by way of explanation. Gordon’s view of the role of theory is stated in his conclusion: “Although the tendency might be to view the relationship between typology and theory as a unidirectional one in which the typology informs the theory, it is evident ... that the relationship between typology and theory also works in the other direction and that the theoretical literature has played a critical role in shaping the research questions targeted for investigation in this work” (p. 303). I would go further and say that typology – in fact, any description – is impossible without a theory. Every description is permeated by theory, and some theory always defines the categories of description. For example, PT states “it is useful to divide the syllable into three parts” (p. 53), to which I would respond that it is a *theory* that the syllable is in three parts. Accepting or rejecting such a theory from the outset determines how one sees the world and categorizes it; if a constituentless syllable theory was adopted (e.g. Clements & Keyser 1983), the syllable typology would have been presented in profoundly different terms.

A more detailed example involves PT’s third chapter on ‘phoneme inventories’. The chapter presupposes that there are such things as phonemes. Of course, not all phonological

theories agree: classical Optimality Theory with Lexicon Optimization has no such concept – there are no restrictions on phonological inputs, and any non-alternating surface segment will appear in a lexical entry (Prince & Smolensky 2004). The practical effect of such theoretical differences shows up in the discussion of the rarity of glottal stops and schwas (pp.45, 76). In phoneme theories, both segments are rare as phonemes because they are often treated as only occurring as the result of epenthesis. However, in classical OT, any non-alternating schwa or glottal stop will appear in a lexical entry. So, does a language’s ‘inventory’ contain /ə/ and /ʔ/? Phoneme theories often say no; other theories say yes. In other words, even something as simple as asking whether a language ‘has’ a particular vowel or consonant is an intimately theoretical issue, and can only be approached from within a particular theoretical framework.

An issue that perhaps deserved more detailed discussion in PT is the ‘object of study’. For typologists, the object of study might variously be a ‘language’ or ‘dialect’, however such a thing is defined. In contrast, for theoretical phonologists the object of study is the phonological module and its possible states. It is not obvious how these two objects of study relate to each other: how does the typologist’s concept of ‘a language’ relate to a phonological module state, and vice versa? If the relationship is not straightforward, how do we translate typological observations about ‘languages’ into terms that a theoretical phonologist can use? This issue of translation is encountered wherever there is an attempt to connect cognitive and non-cognitive theories, but it is not deeply addressed in PT.

A positive aspect of PT is its frequent reminders about quality and quantity of evidence: e.g. “many of the observations ... are based on relatively small databases and should be corroborated through additional data.” (p. 303). Similarly, “most descriptions of stress found in grammars and other primary sources do not contain the level of detail available for more thoroughly studied languages like Spanish, Russian, and Finnish.” (p. 176). PT sets a strong example in its concern with quality of evidence.

Two small aspects of the book annoyed me, both relating to language names. One involves lack of specificity of language designations: e.g. “the nucleus of the first syllable in the English word *little* is a vowel but the nucleus of the second syllable is a syllabic [l]” (p. 82). In which dialect of English? Certainly not in my New Zealand dialect ([lɜrʊ]), or in any that has l-vocalization (or velarization: to be picky, it should be [ɭ] if the author is citing his own dialect).

While use of the terms ‘English’ – or ‘French’, or ‘Spanish’, or ‘Japanese’ for that matter – might be argued to be permissible when one intends to refer to the politically ascendant prestige dialect, in linguistic work failure to specify dialect is barely forgivable, particularly for language names that cover such a vast range of phonological typological variation.

The other language name annoyance was “Axininca Campa” (p. 105). This name is noted as offensive in publically available databases, and is not the sole – or preferred – name of the language (Lewis et al. 2016). Sadly, this pejorative name continues to be commonly used in the theoretical literature (though cf. Staroverov 2014). In typological work, it should be standard practice to carefully examine the names of one’s objects of study to make sure that they are both accurate and appropriate, at the very least noting when a language has several names (as in this case). Of course, such mis-citation is not an isolated phenomenon, not isolated to Ajyíninka Apurucayali alone, and certainly not unique to PT (see e.g. de Lacy 2014).

To conclude, PT is a a valuable survey of cross-linguistic variation in phonology, and an extremely useful source of information about within-language frequency. There are some flaws, such as lack of discussion of the objects of study, but the strengths – particularly its continual emphasis on explanation – make the book very worthwhile for phonologists to consult, and for use in instruction.

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Linguistics Department

Rutgers University

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

[delacy@rutgers.edu]