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## Language universals and linguistic knowledge

In the typological approach, language universals are empirically established generalizations that describe distributional patterns for particular grammatical phenomena across languages. No particular assumption is made as to whether these patterns are part of grammatical representation in a speaker's mind, that is, a speaker's linguistic knowledge. This is in sharp contrast to generatively oriented approaches, where language universals are conceived as a set of constraints on possible languages that are specifically represented in a speaker's mental grammar.

I will discuss a number of facts suggesting that language universals, as defined by typological research, are best regarded as a function of the relative strength of distinct motivations that interact at the diachronic level, rather than the result of specific constraints in a speaker's mental grammar. Thus, typological universals should not be assumed to be part of a speaker's linguistic knowledge. I will also address the issue of whether or not a speaker's mental grammar involves any universal formal components, such as universal grammatical categories and relations. The grammatical diversity displayed by the world's languages reveals that there is no distributional evidence for cross-linguistically and cross-constructionally valid categories and relations that are part of a speaker's linguistic knowledge. This has been dealt with in the literature by assuming either that languages may have non prototypical categories and relations, or that grammatical categories and relations are always language-specific and construction-specific. I will argue that, while there is indeed no evidence for cross-linguistically and cross-constructionally valid categories and relations, the distributional patterns attested in the world's languages are in principle independent of grammatical representation in a speaker's mind.