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Toward a non-aprioristic approach to discourse-associated devices

Vladimir Panov
Vilnius University

In this methodological contribution, I argue for a new approach to discourse phenomena in typology. In previous research, the main focus was on the study of language-particular discourse-associated devices. At the same time, characteristics of these devices were tacitly treated as universal without conducting proper cross-linguistic research based on a rigorous typological methodology. I argue that the method of comparative concepts (Haspelmath 2010), which is successfully applied in better-explored domains of typology, is equally functional in the domain of discourse. Crucially, I demonstrate the importance of treating the formal and the functional side of linguistic devices, or constructions, separately.

1. Introduction

During the last couple of decades, linguistic typology has witnessed several important discussions regarding the very nature of the discipline. The issues discussed include: (1) the objectives of typological research, (2) the nature of typological universals, and (3) the problem of comparability or commensurability of the structures of different languages.

Simultaneously, studies of so-called “discourse” phenomena¹ have flourished. The latter, however, mostly deal with one or sometimes two languages “in depth”, leaving out a broad comparative perspective. In this paper, I will discuss how recent methodological developments in typology, the *comparative concepts* approach in

1. I write “discourse” in quotes as there is no unanimous opinion among linguists on the boundaries of this putative level of linguistic description. It is especially unclear how discourse is different from what is normally thought of as “grammar”. Discussion of the notion of discourse is beyond my scope here. Henceforth in this paper, I use the terms “discourse” and “discourse-associated devices” without quotes, being aware of the fuzziness of the notion of “discourse”. For a discussion, see Du Bois (2003); Diewald (2006); Ariel (2009); Haselow (2013); and Mithun (2015).

particular, may be fruitfully applied to the study of discourse-associated devices. I will focus on the issue (3), which I will be addressing as the *comparability problem*.

Regarding the latter, proposals have been expressed that vary significantly as to their treatment of the structural diversity of languages and the assumptions. Roughly, recent approaches to the comparability problem can be classified in two groups – “splitting” and “defining”. The “splitting” group of approaches is represented by Corbett and colleagues’ *canonical typology* (Brown, Chumakina & Corbett 2013) and Bickel and colleagues’ *multivariate typology* (Bickel 2010). The core of the methodology of the “splitters” consists in classifying and comparing phenomena of different languages on the basis of *parameters* (in canonical typology) or *variables* (in multivariate typology). These are supposed to be as fine-grained as possible and are (not always explicitly) treated as *universal primitives* or *building blocks*. In these approaches, language-particular description and cross-linguistic comparison are carried out on the basis of the same set of categories.

By contrast, the “defining” program was outlined in a number of papers by Haspelmath (2007, 2010, 2018), being grounded in earlier work by Lazard, Croft, Greenberg, and the American descriptivists. This approach stresses the uniqueness of each language’s structures.

When describing a new language, linguists quite naturally use their cross-linguistic knowledge trying to find out whether the linguistic phenomena already familiar to them apply to the newly described language. In the real world, this usually happens in more or less the following manner: a linguist asks herself a question like “Does the new language B have the phenomenon/category X like the language A which I know well?” Of course, most linguists are perfectly aware that this way of asking questions is only a metaphor because no two languages have identical categories. What they really have in mind is “Does the new language B have the phenomenon/category Y which has *something in common* with the category X of the language A which I know well?” The result of the application of such an analogy may be that the newly-described category, although accounted for correctly, is in a new grammatical description given the same name as the “exemplar” category of the language A.

With time, after applying the same label to a critical mass of languages (which may indeed reflect actual similarities between language-particular categories), typologists and theoreticians start to take this common label too seriously, assuming that the categories of particular languages somehow represent the same universal category, which is tacitly thought of as independent of particular languages.

As Haspelmath has argued in a number of papers, building especially on Croft (2001, 2003), this “aprioristic” view of categories is misleading. We do not have enough evidence to assume that pre-established universal cross-linguistic categories exist independently of particular languages (Haspelmath 2007). In other

words, there are no cross-linguistic categories which are *natural kinds* (Haspelmath 2018). Rather, as was claimed in American structuralism, each language has its own categories and must be described in its own terms. Cross-linguistic comparison, by contrast, is only made possible through *comparative concepts* (Haspelmath 2010). The latter are rigorously defined by linguists with the sole goal of cross-linguistic comparison rather than actually-existing categories.

Comparative concepts are not claimed to correspond to any “representations” in speakers’ minds and are preferably, although not necessarily, functional-semantic in nature. An example of a functional-semantic comparative concept is that of the adjective, defined as “a lexeme that denotes a descriptive property and that can be used to narrow the reference of a noun” (Haspelmath 2010: 670). By contrast, formal comparative concepts contain no functional-semantic information. An important formal comparative concept used by Haspelmath and inspired by Bloomfield is “bound form” (opposed to “free form”), defined as “a form that cannot occur on its own” (Haspelmath 2021: 8).

By contrast, categorical universalism, which Haspelmath criticizes, has been described as a “diagnosing” approach (Haspelmath 2015). Within its logic, language-particular instantiations of putative natural-kind-like universal categories can be “diagnosed” on the basis of their “symptoms” which do not necessarily have to match across languages. In this approach, a disease metaphor is at play, which is explicitly present in, e.g. Zwicky (1985). This metaphor is illusory: most diseases are caused by concrete pathogens, which is not the case with linguistic categories unless one assumes a rich Universal Grammar, from which languages pick up categories.

Summing up, in the non-aprioristic “defining” approach, which is now applied by many typologists, the accuracy of definitions is stressed – after all, definitions may dramatically influence the outcomes of comparative cross-linguistic research.

The “splitting” and “defining” approaches to typological studies differ not only with respect to their assumptions but also objectives. Canonical typology aims at creating a universal “grid” of features along which all language-particular phenomena can be uncontroversially classified. Multivariate typology shares this goal, but it additionally focuses on measuring genealogical, areal and universalist factors in determining language-particular structures or, as formulated by Bickel, asking the question *What’s where why?* (Bickel 2015). Conversely, the comparative concepts approach is more traditionally Greenbergian in nature: at least in the case of Haspelmath’s own work, the main focus is on the search for empirical universals and *coding asymmetries* in particular. Nevertheless, the two approaches merge in their problematizing of cross-linguistic structural commensurability and the basic assumption that the descriptive categories of one language cannot be mechanically transferred to another language.

Typology, including the latter two recent groups of approaches, remains mostly focused on the phenomena of “core” grammar such as the marking of argument structure or TAM-categories, or colexification patterns (in lexical typology). By contrast, studies of devices associated with discourse are most often language-particular or, even if cross-linguistic, are narrow and *ad hoc* in the selection of languages and comparative methodology. In sum, most existing cross-linguistic studies of “particles”, “discourse markers”, etc. are best classified as descriptive or at best contrastive rather than typological. Examples of such work are countless. To name just a few of the most influential works, one could mention Schiffrin (1987) or Blakemore (2002) on the Discourse Markers² of English, Thurmair (1989) on the Modal Particles of German, Weydt (1989); Aijmer (1996); Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg (2006) or Rinas (2006), in which a contrastive approach is taken. Most of this work focuses on European, especially Germanic languages. Non-European languages which have been the focus of such studies are mostly the languages of East Asia, where “final particles” are very prominent (see Panov 2020a for an overview), European – Asian contrastive studies also exist (Obe & Haberland 2019).

In their turn, typologists are sometimes explicitly skeptical about the possibility of treating discourse-associated devices in their discipline:

There is less reason for optimism [compared to “core” categories – V.P.] with regard to pragmatic particles such as German *doch, denn, ja, wohl*, and so on, whose conditions of use are extremely subtle and which cannot be readily translated from one language to the next. The typological comparison of such particles is a much more formidable challenge than the comparison of simple grammar and lexicon. (Haspelmath 2007: 128)

In other words, Haspelmath views the comparability problem in the case of discourse-associated devices as irresolvable or difficult to resolve. In the following sections, I will argue that this view is too pessimistic.

In Section 2, I critically analyze some typical false assumptions and methodological flaws which are characteristic of present-day contrastive studies of discourse-associated devices. In Section 3, I discuss a non-aprioristic approach to discourse-associated devices in more detail, and then present some case studies in which a categorical universalist approach fails in adequately accounting for both language-particular structures and cross-linguistic diversity. The conclusions (Section 4) summarizes the essence of the methodological proposal of the present contribution.

2. In this paper, I adhere to the convention of capitalizing language-particular descriptive categories, opposed to lowercase typological labels following authors such as Comrie (1976) or Croft (2001).

2. A categorical universalist approach to discourse-structuring devices

The literature on discourse phenomena is vast, and trying to overview it is beyond the scope of this paper. In the present section, I discuss some flaws and limitations of current linguistic thought in this domain, using a handful of examples which may be viewed as typical. I will restrict myself to devices normally associated with the level of discourse which have *segmental exponence*, i.e. those traditionally referred to by labels such as discourse markers, discourse/modal/pragmatic particles, etc. In Section 3.3, however, in order to come up with a broader view, I go beyond segmental discourse devices.

In the studies of discourse-associated devices, the “diagnostic” or aprioristic approach is still dominating. In what follows, I will demonstrate how this approach works on the basis of examples of such studies, some of which have been influential and widely cited.

Labels such as *discourse markers*, *discourse particles*, *pragmatic particles*, *modal particles*, and some others are extensively used in studies of particular languages. As most terms in linguistics, all these labels evolved historically in association with a certain language-particular descriptive tradition and were then extended to descriptions of new languages. For example, the term *modal particles* is primarily associated with the descriptive tradition of German (*Abtönungspartikeln*, *Modalpartikeln*).³ Indeed, German exhibits a number of segmental elements⁴ (e.g. *doch*, *ja*, *denn*, *nur*, *halt*, etc.) which constitute a class relatively well definable in terms of language-particular morphosyntactic properties. However, even for German, there is no complete agreement among scholars concerning the membership of some elements in this class, see e.g. Schoojans (2013).

There exists an influential edited volume whose declared goal is to provide a cross-linguistic perspective on the *classification* of discourse markers and modal particles (Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013a). In their introductory article, the editors provide the following formulation of their goals:

The aim of the present volume is to investigate the intersection between modal particles (MP) and discourse markers (DM), and to discuss *whether or not it is possible to draw a line between* these two types of linguistic expressions.

(Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013b: 1, emphasis is mine)

3. It may be the case that the descriptive tradition of the German Modal Particles was influenced by the description of particles in ancient Greek, whose morphosyntactic properties are the focus of Wackernagel’s (1892/2020) classical work on 2nd position elements.

4. Here, I say *segmental element* and not *word* or *particle*, as these notions are highly problematic in cross-linguistic studies (Haspelmath 2011; Bickel & Zúñiga 2017).

Already from this formulation, a question arises as to what *drawing a line* exactly means. Most importantly, it is not specified whether the authors talk about distinguishing between categories within particular languages or some kind of universal or cross-linguistic distinction. From the following text, it does not really become clear, but it seems that the authors do not actually see any difference between the language-particular and cross-linguistic dimensions. One can come up with such a conclusion considering the following passage:

The central question in this book concerns the categorization of linguistic expressions: *are MPs and DMs separate linguistic categories, or not? Are MPs a subtype of DMs, or should both be seen as subcategories of the more encompassing class of pragmatic markers (Fraser 1996) or discourse particles, as they both share a general indexical function (Fischer 2006)? If the latter is the case, what is it that distinguishes DMs from MPs? And, what makes it so difficult to tell them apart?*

(Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013b: 2, emphasis is mine)

There are some unspecified *linguistic categories* the authors write about. It seems, however, that the assumption not made explicit is the categorical universalist one:

Analysing whether they *belong to the same grammatical category*, or not, amounts to determining whether they **display** the morphological, distributional and semantic properties of that category. [...] The contributions in this volume regarding the categorization of DMs and MPs in several (typologically distinct) languages seem to offer evidence for this hypothesis in that some particular languages (German, Swedish, Estonian) seem to *display a clear boundary between MPs and DMs, while others do so less* (Catalan, French, Italian, Japanese).

(Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013b: 3, emphasis is mine)

As can be seen from the quotations, it is assumed that there exist universal categories *discourse markers* and *modal particles*, which are instantiated and distinguished (or not) in particular languages. A categorical universalist view is even more explicit in the work by Aijmer (2009), where it is already evident from the very title of the paper *Does English have modal particles?* By formulating her research question in this way, Aijmer assumes that modal particles are a cross-linguistic substance which English may *have* or *lack*.

However, as pointed out in another chapter of the same volume (Diewald 2013), the Modal Particles (MPs) are first and foremost a language-specific morphosyntactic word class of German. Referring to a previous research tradition, the author mentions the following among its characteristics:

- a. MPs are non-inflecting
- b. MPs have heterosemes in other word classes
- c. MPs are obligatorily unstressed

- d. MPs do not have constituent value or phrasal value
- e. MPs are combinable
- f. MPs are restricted to the middle field of the German sentence
- g. MPs very often display an affinity with a particular sentence type
- h. MPs do not have referential meaning
- i. MPs have sentential scope or utterance scope (Diewald 2013: 29–31)

Only a few of these criteria may be reformulated for cross-linguistic comparative purposes, while others are language-specific and rely upon the idiosyncratic German morphosyntax and phonology, especially (f), (d) and (c). The criterion (d) is also theory-dependent.

What seems to have happened in research on MPs is the process described in the beginning of this chapter. Inspired by language-particular categories of the West and North Germanic languages (except English), which indeed exhibit a certain degree of convergence in this respect, scholars have been trying to find out whether other languages have structurally similar devices. However, it is misleading to look for the German Modal Particles in Japanese or the English Discourse Markers in Russian. Indeed, what would count as *the middle field* in non-Germanic languages? What corresponds to the lack of stress in tonal languages? Nevertheless, the editors of the volume (Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013a) tacitly assume a universal nature of the properties of these language-particular devices and ignore the language-particular nature of category assignment, instead of defining the categories of each language in its own terms and comparing languages through comparative concepts.⁵

In the following sections, I will present in more detail an alternative, a non-aprioristic approach to cross-linguistic comparison in the domain of discourse-structuring devices. I will illustrate its fruitfulness with a study of a handful of borderline cases, where it is particularly evident that categorical universalism is failing.

5. In this paper, I leave outside my scope the view of discourse phenomena in mainstream generative grammar (MGG). Not only is it characterized by categorical universalism but it also shares the nativist assumption of MGG. In MGG approaches, discourse devices are accounted for in terms of higher level *functional projections*. In general, criticism which has in other linguistics frameworks been expressed toward MGG as a whole equally holds for the view of discourse devices within it. Bayer & Struckmeyer (2017) is a collection of papers representative of MGG approaches to discourse particles.

3. Non-aprioristic approach

Since the times of de Saussure, it has become clear that linguistic expressions are best treated as signs, that is, bilateral units with a form and a meaning. Modern cognitive approaches such as different versions of Construction Grammar (further on CxG) or Cognitive Grammar, as well as non-mainstream generative approaches such as the Parallel Architecture stress that the relationship between form and meaning is not necessarily straightforward, or one-to-one. Rather, linguistic signs, or constructions, are complex constellations of phonetic, morphosyntactic and functional-semantic information, in which different layers are linked to each other. Crucially, structural schemas with or without filled slots (phonetic information) are able to bear holistic meanings, but they remain signs – form-meaning pairings.⁶

The first principle of the non-aprioristic approach in cross-linguistic comparison is treating the meaning and the form of constructions separately. Consequently, one should have no a-priori expectations about meaning-form correspondences. If one thinks in this fashion, it makes little sense to ask questions about, say, *modal particles*, which are by definition types of signs, or form-meaning pairings of particular languages. Rather, the most important goal of typology as understood by Croft (2001, 2003) or Bybee (1985, 2010) is studying the cross-linguistic similarities and differences between constructions, where established regularities in form-meaning pairings on the cross-linguistic level are themselves empirical facts requiring explanation. For instance, it is highly typical for argument roles such as S, A, or P to be marked with bound morphemes on verbs and nouns but not by utterance intonation. This is an empirical observation on cross-linguistic constructional variation, which requires explanation (*usage-based* or *nativist*).

Segmental discourse-associated devices such as the Discourse Markers of English or the Modal Particles of the other Germanic languages are also best seen as language-particular constructions (Fischer & Alm 2013; Alm, Behr & Fischer 2018). (1) presents an example of an English Discourse Marker and (2) an example of a German Modal Particle.

(1) *So, I've decided i'm going to go to the bank and ask for a car loan.*⁷

(2) *Aber er hat ja gar nichts an!*
 but he.NOM have.PRS.3SG **PRT** at_all nothing on
 'But he [the emperor] hasn't got anything on [evidently]!⁸

6. On constructionist approaches to discourse, see Rakhilina & Bychkova (this volume).

7. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/discourse-markers-so-right-okay>.

8. The German translation of Hans Christian Andersen's *Keiserens nye klæder* ('The Emperor's new clothes') <https://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/mlg/mai/mem/de9756559.htm>

Importantly, it would be misleading to claim that the German elements such as *ja* or *doch* link the phonetic sequences [ja] and [dox] with particular functions. Rather, it is the phonetic sequence in a certain morphosyntactic context that conveys the function. *Ja* and *doch* used as the Modal Particles of German fit the word-class criteria listed in the Section 2. By contrast, their stressed counterparts are used as independent utterances and have different discourse functions with the meanings ‘yes’ and ‘on the contrary’, respectively, providing one-word answers to questions or reactions to statements. Thus, Modal Particles as well as Reply Words are better viewed as constructions with inherent phonetic and morphosyntactic properties rather than as traditional *lexemes*. While the Modal Particles *ja* and *doch* are constructions with one filled slot and open slots for the host utterance, the stressed *ja* and *doch* are constructions-words, which cannot be changed. As Fischer & Alm (2013: 82) put it, “While the particles themselves are not specified for word class, it is the constructions that make a particle a discourse or a modal particle”.

The approach of Fischer & Alm’s (2013) paper (see also Fischer 2006; Alm, Behr & Fischer 2018) comes close to what I advocate here. It is written in the framework of Croft’s Radical Construction Grammar, a version of CxG purposefully designed for typology. In this framework, two tenets are crucial: (1) all categories are viewed as language-specific, (2) meaning and form should be treated separately. In fact, these are the principles Haspelmath (2007, 2010, 2018) reinforces and elaborates. As the authors put it, “Taking a construction grammar perspective thus means to explore the co-occurrence relationships between functional and formal characteristics” (Fischer & Alm 2013: 48).

Let us now turn to case studies which are illustrative of how the categorical universalist approach fails in accounting for both language-particular and cross-linguistic facts.

3.1 Language-particular analysis: The Buriat verb and “particles”⁹

Buriat (or Buryat) is a Mongolic language spoken in the circum-Baikal region of the Russian Federation, in Mongolia, and China. Structurally, it represents the *Altaic* (*Transeurasian*) linguistic type quite well. It is strictly verb-final and exhibits a highly concatenative type of nominal and verbal morphology with transparent morpheme boundaries and a vowel harmony.

Despite the transparent morpheme segmentation, questions arise when it comes to establishing word boundaries. It is especially problematic in the domain of the verb and predicate in general. In traditional descriptions of Buriat such as Sanzheev, Bertagaev & Cydendambaev (1962), the structure of the verb is described

9. This section is based on my own field data. I express my special gratitude to Vyacheslav Ivanov.

in terms of root and affixes attaching to the root. On the other hand, *particles* are treated separately as a phenomenon of a different kind. This is supported by the contemporary spelling rules.¹⁰ For instance, Example (3a) represents a form traditionally analyzed as a verbal form, (3b) as a verb and a particle, and (3c) as a verb followed by a series of particles.

- (3) a. *Ši nom vnša-dág-ši*
2SG book read-HAB-2SG¹¹
'You read books'
- b. *Tere nom vnša-dág gu?*
3SG book read-HAB Q
'Does s/he read books?'
- c. *Tere nom vnša-dág xa yum daa*
3SG book read-HAB EVID CERT ALLOC
'Of course, s/he reads books!'

Such an analysis looks reasonable from the European perspective, where the *-dag* (and its harmonic variants *-deg/-dog*) marker of the habitual aspect is viewed as belonging to the verbal morphology (TAM-markers are regarded as a typically verbal domain), and so is the subject 2SG agreement marker *-š*, whereas the question marker *gu* looks like a particle, not unlike the utterance-initial polar question particles of the Eastern European languages such as Polish (*czy*) or Lithuanian (*ar*). However, this analysis is misleading. In (4a), the agreement marker *-š* follows the question *particle*, and in (4b) it is inserted into the sequence of the *particle* morphemes in a particular and the only possible position – the slot immediately preceding the final slot reserved for *daa*. In addition, it is used in a specific phonological form obligatory after consonants. It is spelled bound with the previous “word” *yum*:

- (4) a. *Ši nom vnša-dág gu-š?*
2SG book read-HAB Q-2SG
'Do you read books?'
- b. *Ši nom vnša-dág xa yum-ši daa*
2SG book read-HAB EVID CERT-2SG ALLOC
'Of course, you read books!'

The elements *yum*, *xa*, *gu*, and *ši* are not subject to vowel harmony alternations, whereas *daa*, which always occupies the final slot in a sequence of non-root

10. Buriat in Russia uses an alphabet based on the Russian Cyrillic. In 1930s, a Latin-based script was used. In the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union before the thirties, as well as in China, and occasionally in Russia nowadays as well, the classical Mongolian script is in use.

11. In my glosses, I use the standard Leipzig abbreviations www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php

morphemes adjacent to a verb, exhibits harmonic variants in colloquial speech. In addition, the listed elements have different positional properties. While *yum*, *xa*, *š(i)* and *daa* obligatorily follow the predicate, even if the predicate occurs in a non-final position (which happens quite rarely, mostly in self-correction), the question marker *gu*, although normally used utterance-finally, can follow the focalized constituents in alternative questions:

- (5) *Ši nom gu hedguul gu vnša-dag-ši?*
 2SG book Q journal Q read-HAB-2SG
 ‘Do you read books or journals?’

The relative order of the question marker *gu* (if it does not move to a focalized constituent), the subject agreement markers (*-š(i)*- and others), and the allocutive marker *daa* is fixed: *gu – agreement – daa*, with no other element able to follow *daa*. However, markers such as *yum*, *xa* and some others, which precede the final *gu – agreement – daa* cluster, are able to occur in different orders, which results in different meanings unpredictable from the meanings of the constituting parts. Thus, in isolation, *yum* signals a high degree of certainty (an epistemic modal meaning), and *xa* signals the lack of direct evidence or complete certainty (evidential + epistemic):

- (6) a. *Tere nom vnša-dág yum.*
 3SG book read-HAB **certainly**
 ‘No doubt, s/he reads books.’
 b. *Tere nom vnša-dág xa.*
 3SG book read-HAB **apparently**
 ‘It seems that s/he reads books.’

When combined together, different orders result in different meanings. *Yum xa* (7a) signals an unexpected nature of the event (mirative), while *xa yum* (7b) has a function of marking information that appears uncontroversial to the speaker (the *enimitive*, see Panov 2020b). Yet another non-compositional meaning ‘of course’ (7c) evolves when the sequence *xa yum* is followed by the allocutive *daa*:

- (7) a. *Tere nom vnša-dág yum xa.*
 3SG book read-HAB **it_turns_out**
 ‘Turns out, s/he reads books.’
 b. *Tere nom vnša-dág xa yum.*
 3SG book read-HAB **after_all**
 ‘After all, s/he reads books.’
 c. *Tere nom vnša-dág xa yum daa.*
 3SG book read-HAB **of_course**
 ‘Of course s/he reads books.’

Finally, the habitual marker *-dag/-deg/-dog* exhibits two properties which the rest of the elements discussed above lack: (1) it is not “promiscuous” (Spencer & Luís 2012), being able to attach exclusively to verbal roots; (2) it is the last element within the stress domain, being stressed itself. These two features make it a more prototypical verbal affix than the rest of the elements discussed. The features relevant for an adequate description of the discussed Buriat predicate-associated bound morphemes may be summarized as shown in Figure 1. This pilot study only involves a small part of the predicate-associated markers of Buriat.

	<i>yum</i> ‘epistemic certainty’	<i>xa</i> ‘epistemic uncertainty, indirect evidence’	<i>gu</i> ‘polar question’	<i>daa(dee/ doo)</i> ‘allocutive’	<i>ši</i> ‘SUBJ.2SG’	<i>dag/ deg/dog</i> ‘habitual’
within the stress domain	–	–	–	–	–	+
vowel harmony	–	–	–	(+)	–	+
idiosyncratic phonological alternations	–	–	–	–	+	–
strictly follows the predicate	+	+	–	+	+	+
promiscuous attachment	+	+	+	+	+	–
fixed position in a sequence	–	–	+	+	+	+
non-compositional meanings in different combinations	+	+	–	+	–	–

Figure 1. The “particles” of Buriat

I will now sum up the analysis of the predicate-associated markers of Buriat. In order to be able to adequately account for their actual behavior and functions, one needs a long list of characteristics, which are language-particular. It turns out that each element exhibits its own combination of different properties, although certain clustering tendencies may be observed. In any case, calling any of these elements *affixes*, *particles*, or *clitics* would not contribute any meaningful information about their actual behavior. Given that some elements exhibit non-compositional meanings in certain combinations, it seems particularly reasonable to strictly separate morphosyntactic and functional aspects even in language-particular description of Buriat, let alone when treating its material in a typological study.

3.2 Same function in different morphosyntactic disguise:

Vocative vs. allocutive

As already mentioned, terms used in typology and general linguistics usually have their origin in different language-particular descriptive traditions. Thus, due to historical reasons, structurally or semantically close phenomena described independently for unrelated languages are sometimes treated as if they were more different than they actually are. A typical example would be the Germanic *umlaut*, the *ablaut* of the old Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European languages, and the Afro-Asiatic non-concatenative morphology. All these more or less established labels refer to very similar phenomena, namely, meaning-carrying stem alternations. However, being described in different periods for different languages within different frameworks, different labels are used in different traditions.

A situation of this sort may also be observed for the label *vocative*. The *vocative* is an old label, which originated as early as in the traditional grammars of Latin of the Roman period, in which it refers to a special inflectional nominal case form whose function is marking the addressee of a speech act. Consequently, the use of the Latin Vocative requires the overt presence of the addressee NP. A typical example is:

- (8) *Cena-b-is bene mi Fabull-e apud me*
 sup-FUT-2SG well my.VOC Fabullus-VOC at I.ACC
 ‘Thou’lt sup right well with me, Fabullus mine’ (Catul. 13, Perseus)

In this sentence, the Vocative case is marked by the bound morpheme *-e* on the noun. The Latin Vocative has different allomorphs in different inflectional classes and triggers case agreement on the dependent possessive pronoun ‘my’, where it has a non-segmental expression. In Latin, whenever a noun phrase occurs in the function of an addressee, the use of Vocative is obligatory.

Another language of classical Antiquity, ancient Greek, besides the inflectional marking of Vocative in its case system very much like in Latin, employs a specific half-obligatory element *ō* in front of a noun phrase, which is considered a definite article in traditional descriptions. In recent descriptions, however, *ō* is no longer treated as an article but rather as a specific addressee-marking word (van Emde Boas et al. 2019: 381); its important morphosyntactic difference from the articles is the lack of gender and number agreement with the noun.

- (9) *kalōs eleks-as, ō gyn-ai!*
 well say.PFV-AOR.2SG *ō* woman-VOC
 ‘Well said, my lady!’ (van Emde Boas et al. 2019: 381)

In classical Arabic, a structurally similar unchangeable element *yaa* is obligatory and occurs with nouns in the Nominative or Accusative case:

- (10) *yaa zayd-u, qaabal-tu ʔab-aa-ka*
 VOC Zayd-NOM meet.PFV-1SG father-ACC-2SG.M.POSS
 ‘Zayd, I met your father’ (Al-Bataineh 2020: 331)

Daniel & Spencer (2009) provide the following definition of the vocative:

The vocative is the form used for calling out and attracting or maintaining the addressee’s attention. Unlike some other forms used in this way, such as imperatives (*Listen!* or *Look here!*), a vocative names the addressee explicitly, by using a term referring to and, so to speak, directly acting on them.

(Daniel & Spencer 2009: 626)

Daniel & Spencer’s (2009) definition treats both the functional-semantic and the morphosyntactic sides of the typological notion of the vocative, i.e., the vocative is a *hybrid* concept (Haspelmath 2018). While the functional part of the definition seems clear, its morphosyntactic part suffers from imprecision. It is not readily clear what the authors mean by “nam[ing] the addressee explicitly”. Explicitness of what kind? A full NP? A pronoun? Or maybe a special bound marker? The authors overtly exclude the imperative, but, otherwise, the definition allows for a wide range of interpretations. For example, forms known as the *allocutive* defined by Antonov (2015: 54) as “linguistic encoding (in certain sociopragmatic and syntactic circumstances) of a non-argumental addressee in some or all main clause predicates” seems to be in accordance with Daniel & Spencer’s (2009) definition of the vocative. A prototypical allocutive is found in Basque, where it is marked by short (one-consonant-long) predicate-bound suffixes which agree with the addressee (not necessarily overtly present) in gender:

- (11) a. *Bilbo-ra n-oa-k*
 Bilbao-ALL 1SG-go-ALLOC.M
 ‘I am going to Bilbao’ [male addressee]
 b. *Bilbo-ra n-oa-n*
 Bilbao-ALL 1SG-go-ALLOC.F
 ‘I am going to Bilbao’ [female addressee] (Antonov 2015: 57)

In Japanese, a similar strategy is involved, but no gender distinctions are made: the allocutive suffix is present whenever the speaker wants to show her/his respect toward the addressee.

- (12) *ik-imasi-ta*
 go-ALLOC-PRF
 ‘I/She/He went.’ (Antonov 2015: 59)

In the Japanese and Basque examples, one cannot say that the addressee is not explicitly *named*, but her/his naming is morphosyntactically different from typical examples of the vocative. In the allocutive, the addressee is overtly present as a bound marker attached on the right of the predicate (as a suffix), whereas in the vocative it is typically thought of as associated with the addressee noun phrase or, more rarely, a second person pronoun. Using Kibrik's (2011, 2019) terminology designed for the typology of reference devices, we can say that the nominal expression of the addressee is a *full* device (detailed referent specification), whereas bound markers like the vocative or allocutive affixes/particles are *reduced* devices (small amount of referent specification) with different morphosyntactic properties. The latter occur with (=are attached to) different functional-semantic and morphosyntactic types of hosts.

Summing up, instances like the ancient Greek and Latin inflectional vocatives, the Greek and Arabic vocative particles carry the function of explicit naming and attracting attention of the addressee expressed by noun-phrase-bound markers with different degrees of phonetic interaction between the nominal stem and the marker (*weldedness*, as Haspelmath 2021 names it). The allocutive markers of Basque and Japanese express the same function with bound markers attached to a predicate.

Apart from typical vocatives and allocutives, languages exhibit markers with similar functions, whose morphosyntactic properties do not fall under the definitions of either of the two. The modern Greek element *vre* or *re* (the latter being more typical of the present-day urban colloquial speech) is typically classified as a vocative particle in descriptions (Spyropoulos et al. 2012: 351). But this is only part of the truth. Most often, *re* is really used in front of the addressee noun and is used to “show affection if the addressee is an intimate of the speaker” (Spyropoulos et al. 2012: 351) as in (13):

- (13) *Sopa re Janni*
 be_quiet RE Yannis
 ‘Be quiet, Yannis.’ (Spyropoulos et al. 2012: 352)

However, *re* demonstrates a degree of distributional flexibility. In fact, it may occur in the same function in virtually any position in a sentence (often on its edge) with no overt nominal or pronominal addressee:

- (14) *Afiste me re ime astinomikos!*
 leave_alone.IMP.PL I.ACC RE be.1SG policeman.NOM.SG
 ‘Leave me alone, I am a policeman!’ (HNC)
- (15) *Re kseris ti ine(...) na kanis voltes mesa sti nixta?*
 RE know.2SG what is(...) that do.2SG walks inside in night
 ‘Do you know what it is like to go for walks in the middle of the night?’ (HNC)

In (14) and (15) the addressee is not expressed by a full-fledged noun phrase: it is *re* itself that is the overt expression of the presence of an addressee. This is reflected in the lack of addressee NPs in the English translations.

Finally, *re* is a bound form. It requires the presence of a host utterance consisting of at least one free form and does not occur as an independent utterance. In sum, *re* cannot be uncontroversially classified as a vocative or allocutive marker. Being a bound form, it *attaches* to various word classes without any evident preferences (the choice of position is flexible). Its function, however, remains stable: it is an overt marker of the presence of an addressee intimate of the speaker. The modern Greek *re* is an instance of a language-particular device with an idiosyncratic set of morphosyntactic properties but a function similar to those found in many other languages.¹² If treated in typology, its morphosyntactically idiosyncratic behavior must be taken into account.

3.3 Polar question: Same function, diversity in marking

The cases of Buriat *particles* and the modern Greek *re* illustrate how universal functions find highly language-specific morphosyntactic expression in particular languages. In these two cases, the language-particular devices cannot be assigned to any pre-established cross-linguistic category such as modal particles or the vocative. The inclusion of these devices in a typological study is then only possible by defining separate comparative concepts for formal and functional properties.

An illustration of a discourse function successfully investigated in typology, whose formal expression varies significantly between languages and even within one language, is that of polar questions. In typological studies of polar questions, the function and the formal expression have often been treated separately. In the WALS chapter, Dryer (2013a) distinguishes between seven typological values for polar question formation strategies: question particle, interrogative verb morphology, both question particle and interrogative verb morphology, interrogative word order, absence of declarative morphemes, interrogative intonation only, no interrogative-declarative distinction. Apparently, languages may exhibit more than one strategy simultaneously – this is particularly true in the case of question intonation, which often co-occurs with other kinds of marking.

12. In fact, devices sharing their morphosyntactic characteristics, function and etymology with the Greek (*v*)*re* are found everywhere across the Balkans and even in a broader region. Therefore, *v(re)* is area-particular, not just language-particular, although the corresponding devices of each of the languages of the areas exhibit a handful of particular characteristics beyond shared ones. For more details see Vastenius (2011).

Dryer recognizes that in some languages, the strategy employed is difficult to classify due to a high degree of idiosyncrasy: e.g., he notes that in Burunge (Cushitic, Afro-Asiatic) the final syllable of a declarative sentence is pronounced in a whispered manner, but with a simple vowel in polar questions. In Dryer's map, it has been decided to subsume it under the *morphological* type. Even such a language as English does not allow for an uncontroversial classification across Dryer's categories: although it is similar to the *word order* type, the split of a verb into the main verb and the auxiliary verb in questions is highly language-specific. Question particles/clitics (defined by Dryer as exhibiting freedom as to the category of word they attach to) studied in detail in the Eurasian context by Hölzl (2018) also exhibit a high degree of cross-linguistic variation in terms of their position in a sentence or ability to mark focalized constituents. In the case of polar questions, the separation of formal strategies, which exhibit great diversity, and the function conceived as universal allows one to find typological biases, e.g. areal ones – the topic of particular interest of Bickelian *What's where why?* distributional typology. For instance, the word order strategy seems to be rare worldwide but characteristic of Standard Average European (Dryer 2013a), polar question sentence-final particles are typical of East Asia (Hölzl 2018; Panov 2020a), while sentence-initial particles are a hallmark of (North-)Eastern Europe (Dryer 2013a).

Dryer's (2013a, 2013b) WALs contributions as well as Hölzl's (2018) in-depth areal typological study of polar questions may be considered examples of successful typological investigations matching the standards of the non-aprioristic approach. They use definitions (comparative concepts) and separately treat functional and morphosyntactic properties. Both studies start out from a function and look at its formal expression, getting meaningful results (e.g., the geographical distribution of certain types of marking as well as universal statistical tendencies). On the other hand, in these studies, the idiosyncratic nature of categories of particular languages is taken into account, and the goals of language-particular description and typological investigation are strictly distinguished.

4. Conclusion

In this contribution, I have presented a methodological reflection on the typological treatment of phenomena usually thought of as associated with the level of discourse. I started from a critical analysis of some previous works which I view as typical. I argue that until now, the approach to the cross-linguistic study of discourse phenomena has largely been aprioristic, that is, characterized by categorical universalism. In this approach, devices such as discourse markers or modal particles are treated as universal categories, which manifest themselves in various forms

in different languages and can be *diagnosed* in a way parallel to a disease – on the basis of a number of *symptoms*. I provide several examples of categories of different languages which resist this kind of treatment. Instead, I argue that the *comparative concepts* method proposed by Haspelmath (2010) for the typology of *classical* grammatical categories (alignment, TAM, etc.) is equally applicable in the typology of discourse-associated devices. In the spirit of Haspelmath's work, as well as constructionist approaches, one should define separate functional-semantic and morpho-syntactic comparative concepts. The examples of functional discourse-associated comparative concepts mentioned in this paper are the marking of the presence of an addressee, polar question, uncontroversial information. Formal comparative concepts may include such notions as segmental/non-segmental expression, boundness, *promiscuous attachment* (ability to attach to different parts of speech), position in the host sentence or utterance. In pursuing specific goals such as finding areal patterns of distribution of discourse phenomena, one can include both functional and formal comparative concepts in the definition of a phenomenon of interest. For instance, in my own work on the *enimitive* (Panov 2020b), I investigate devices whose meaning is framing the propositional content of an utterance as uncontroversial to the speaker (e.g., the German Modal Particles *ja* and *doch*). However, I include a formal restriction as well: I am only interested in segmental bound forms. Thus, I exclude lexical expressions like the English *after all*, which convey a similar universally-definable function. This *hybrid* way of defining the research object, as I argue in the paper, results in finding interesting areal clusters. Crucially, however, one should make this hybrid nature of the definition explicit, without assuming the universal character of an idiosyncratic function-form cluster. Other ways of following a non-aprioristic approach are those using only functional or only formal comparative concepts, studying the diversity of formal expression of a defined function (*from function to form*) or, conversely, the functional potential of a certain kind of formal expression (*from form to function*).

This contribution contains little original research or primary linguistic data and is to be interpreted as a methodological research program for future implementation. Some already existing research – e.g. Rakhilina & Bychkova (this volume); Dryer (2013a, 2013b); Hölzl (2018); Alm, Behr & Fischer (2018) take approaches close to the one discussed here. The goal of this paper is, therefore, to present the non-aprioristic approach to the typology of discourse phenomena with maximum explicitness.

Abbreviations

1	1st person	HAB	habitual
2	2nd person	NOM	nominative
3	3rd person	PFV	perfective
ACC	accusative	PRT	discourse particle
ALLOC	allocutive	PRS	present tense
AOR	aorist	Q	question
CERT	certainty	SG	singular
EVID	evidential	VOC	vocative
FUT	future		

Digital sources

Perseus	Perseus Digital Library http://www.consul.embrussia.ru/node/164
HNC	Hellenic National Corpus http://hnc.ilsp.gr

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