

# Is redundancy as universal as linguists say it is?

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Syntagmatic redundancy, the repetition of information in a sentence, clause, or phrase (Trudgill 2011: 22), has been claimed to be a universal property of human language. In this talk, I will argue that syntagmatic redundancy is indeed universal, but some types are more universal than others. If we want to understand typological variation in redundancy, we need to look into different types of repetition, and the multiple functions that repetitive marking can fulfill.

Claims about the universality of redundancy usually combine selected examples with an explanation in terms of a supposed advantage of information repetition. For example, Dahl (2004: 9) argues that “by increasing redundancy [...] the sender can reduce the risk of faulty delivery”. The inherently functionalist idea behind such claims is that doubling phenomena are universal because doubling has universal functions such as increasing the chance of successful communication, facilitating processing, or enhancing learnability.

However, neither the universality of syntagmatic redundancy, nor its communicative and cognitive advantages are backed up by typological or psycholinguistic evidence. The 22 languages studied in Leufkens (2015) all exhibit syntagmatic redundancy in some form, but there is large variation in type and extent to which they do so. Regarding processability and learnability, there is evidence for a facilitatory effect of frequency of linguistic items, but there is no comparable evidence for similar advantages effected by intra-clausal repetition.

To investigate how universal redundancy really is I have conducted a typological study of concord, defined as cases of meaning overlap between lexical and functional elements. Examples are given in (1)-(4); repeated information is indicated in a separate column and underlined in the examples.

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|----------------------|-----|--|
| (1) argument concord | 3sg | <u>She</u> speaks.   |
| (2) negative concord | neg | <u>No</u> vino <u>nadie</u> . ‘Nobody came’ (Spanish, Zeijlstra 2004: 130) |
| (3) plural concord   | pl  | <u>five</u> elephants  |
| (4) temporal concord | pst | <u>Yesterday</u> , I arrived at the hotel.                                 |

Grammar-mining of a 50-language variety sample shows that argument and temporal concord are (near-)universal, but negative and plural concord are not, undermining claims that redundancy is universal. Moreover, reference grammars indicate that there is large variation as to the functions that the different types of concord may fulfill, which may provide an explanation for the attested differences in cross-linguistic distribution.

**References:** Dahl, Ö. (2004). Growth and maintenance of linguistic complexity. Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Leufkens, S. (2015). Transparency in language: A typological study (PhD Dissertation, University of Amsterdam). Utrecht: LOT. Trudgill, P. (2011). Sociolinguistic typology: Social determinants of linguistic complexity. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Zeijlstra, H. (2004). Sentential negation and negative concord (PhD Dissertation, University of Amsterdam). Utrecht: LOT.