Dominant languages distort ideas of language diversity.
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The dominant 'imperial' languages of recent centuries tend to influence ideas of what is normal in languages, including in the domains of phonetics and phonology. Their spread is also the leading cause of language loss, and before loss, of convergence between indigenous languages and imperial ones through the influence of loanword phonology and other borrowings. The biggest imperial languages are those of the primary former European colonial powers, namely English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, as well as Russian and (Mandarin) Chinese whose expansion largely affects national territory, and Arabic, whose influence is further boosted through being the language of Islam. 5 of these 7 languages are Indo-European, 4 of them from Western Europe, and 3 of these are in the Romance family. Given this fact, that these languages tend to have some predominant typological patterns is no surprise.

As others have pointed out this can lead to distortions about what is considered 'normal' in languages and what topics attract research attention. For example, voicing contrasts in both plosives and fricatives (e.g. p/b s/z) are found in 6 of the 7 so this might be regarded as typical. But in a sample of 1001 languages (one for each night?) chosen to represent a wide range of genetic and geographical variation only one-third of the languages share this trait, and one-third have no voicing contrast in obstruents of any kind, while the rest have a contrast either among plosives or fricatives but not both.

All the imperial languages allow consonant clusters in onset and/or coda (depending in part on analysis choices), and 3 permit elaborate onsets and/or codas of 3 or more consonants. This draws attention to accounting for the structure of complex onsets and codas, e.g. through concepts like the Sonority Sequencing Principle. However in a slightly smaller sample (996 languages) 50% of the languages allow at most one consonant in onset and 66% have at most one consonant in coda, often drawn from a limited set. The preferences that occur for combinations of simple onset and the following vowel, or restrictions that may generally apply to coda consonants, which are frequently a limited set compared to the range of onsets, are under-studied by comparison to the effort devoted to complex sequences.

The 'imperial' languages also lack many types of sounds that are relatively frequent globally, have others at higher frequencies than are globally typical and have patterns of structure that are less common cross-linguistically. For example, none of the 7 have contrastive laryngealized consonants although around 25% of a sample of 1004 languages have them. As the only tonal language in the set, Mandarin tends to define the expectation of what tone languages are like (with /má, mà, mǎ, mâ/ used in numerous textbooks) but the highest percentage of tone languages has a simple contrast of High vs Low (49% of 352) often with restrictions on their distribution. The fact that French only has nasalized low and mid vowels has stimulated research looking for reasons why nasality is favored with lower vowels, whereas most languages with nasalized vowels have nasal counterparts to all their oral vowels (52% of 209), and of those with fewer nasalized than oral vowels 73% have both high and low nasalized vowels with, most typically, some or all of the mid oral vowels lacking a nasal counterpart.

This talk will thus highlight how familiarity with dominant languages can distort ideas about the phonological patterns of language in general and lead the linguistic community away from valuing all languages equally. It will update some survey results from sources like *Patterns of Sounds* and the *World Atlas of Language Structures* (WALS) and add new points of interest to this discussion.