an era of universalizing models
formal/rationalist/generativist (Chomsky)
neutral as to speaker vs. hearer but biased toward parsing
cognitivist/naturalist (Langacker)
speaker-oriented (speech reflects real-time cognitive processes)

“typology” has been a useful corrective and refuge against this tide
a welcome institutional cover for fieldwork
keeping that flame alive in a hostile academic environment (thanks, MPI-EVA!)

but: polarization into “theory” and “description/typology” is ultimately untenable
to the general public: typology is a starting point for research (e.g. WALS), not a destination
institutionalized castes of formal/generative, typological, and historical linguists
boundaries maintained by captive journals, conferences, departments
socialization: accept “standard assumptions” of a model or face expulsion
many typologists steer away from contentious “big” issues about the nature of language

previous efforts by typologists to dramatize crosslinguistic variation
1. OV versus VO
   once claimed to be a major binary split, reverberating across the grammar
2. ergativity
   claim of “ergative syntax” (Dixon) as a structural mirror image of English
   these turned out not to be master principles, reverberating across grammars
   original binary classifications are now split into multiple subtypes
   many languages cannot be coded on these variables

most typologists have therefore lost interest in integrated grammatical systems
languages are now broken up into small, quasi-functional domains
—case-marking, linear order, coordination, reflexives, numerals, etc. etc.
focus on easily coded variables nested within a specific domain
almost all typology conferences, books, articles are organized around such domains

parallels with social anthropology of the mid-20th C.
patri-/matrilineal descent proposed as a ramifying “master principle,” but has disappointed
breakup into discrete domains (“institutions”): kinship, ritual, economics
structural-functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown)
Human Relations Area Files = HRAF (the “WALS” of social anthropology)

the role of extreme cases in other fields
botany: parasitic, subterranean, aquatic, and carnivorous plants
   same dynamics as “normal” plants: nutrients, water, photosynthesis, defences, symbioses
anthropology: field reports of “promiscuous” and “violent” cultures
   critical assessment, field revisits, second opinions, debunking
textbooks in such fields are full of extended sections about (real or apparent) outliers
functional trade-offs
grammatical systems versus low-level typology
grammar is about interactions, not juxtapositions
example 1: reflexives and imperatives
typologists: analyse these separately (domain-specific coding)
grammatonians: how do imperatives interact with reflexivization?
do covert imperative “subjects” always bind reflexive objects?
example 2: prosody and NP structure
typologists: analyse prosodic systems and NP syntax separately
grammarians: how do prosodic systems interact with NP syntax?
do adjectives & numerals have identical prosodic interactions with nouns?

the real deal: (non)configurationality
this is the mother lode of crosslinguistic variation
it ramifies across the entire grammar and lexicon, unlike ergativity and OV/VO
it is barely mentioned in typology textbooks and is widely disregarded by typologists
there are few radically nonconfigurational languages, making statistics and mapping difficult
many conventional typological features are uncodable in such languages
if typologists aren’t interested in them, why should generativists/cognitivists be?

typology of configurationality
a) tightly-phrasal languages (most, including English)
b) chunkily-phrasal languages, e.g. Cambodian/Khmer (Haiman)
   “NP” expressed in separable two-word chunks (mini-phrases)
c) nonphrasal languages (little or no syntax above word-level)
i) analytic subtype: (idealized) colloquial Indonesian (Gil)
   speaker utters a string of monomorphemic words
   the listener guesses the clause-level sense from among multiple possibilities
   (rather like reading unpointed Arabic script!)
   a colloquial register, coexisting with phrasal formal/written registers
ii) polysynthetic subtype: Nunggubuyu (Australia)
   morphologically elaborate words (esp. verbs) but no higher syntax
   no higher register, no escape from nonconfigurality

ripple effects of nonphrasal grammar
no clauses
   hence no systematic subject/predicate distinction
no clausal “tense” requirement
no multi-word NPs (DPs)
   hence no syntax of (nonaffixal) modifiers/determiners
   adjectives, demonstratives, quantifiers, and numerals have no distinct status
   juxtaposition (apposition) rather than phrasal integration
recursion as such is not possible
not merely avoided for cultural reasons (Piraha)
verb-NP government is not possible (except for pronominal agreement in verbs)
   so no structural case-marking of “subject” and “object” NPs
no edge-marking for the scope of modal operators (negation, conditional ‘if’)
   resort to word-level morphological gimmicks to indicate continuing modal scope
no anaphora
   no reflexives, reciprocals, logophorics outside of verb morphology (intransitivization)
no imperatives? (should be possible via verb morphology, but absent in Nunggubuyu)
phrasality should be the number-one highlight of crosslinguistic research
a direct challenge to core assumptions of generative grammar
  but “emergent” two-word proto-phrases occur in discourse
forces rethinking of the relationship between grammar and “conceptual structure”
speech draws on, but is not a crystallate of, conceptual structures

sociohistorical typology
  Trudgill on sociolinguistic typology of tightly-knit small-scale societies
  these languages can put heavy processing burdens on listeners in either of two ways:
    a) speech is skeletal, listener must piece together semantic relationships
    b) speech is elaborate, listener must parse complex morphological structures
  cf. colloquial Indonesian (a) and Nunggubuyu (b)
typology can be integrated into mainstream linguistics by highlighting extreme cases
  but it risks being trampled underfoot in quantitative macro-geographical studies
  “big” is small

which dead ancestor to worship?
  Greenberg?
    open-minded, inductive scientific method
    code traits in a neutral sample of languages, discover statistical correlations
    interpret the results later (with emphasis on “master principle” of markedness)
    in tune methodologically with most recent typology
  Whorf?
    the first cross-linguistically aware cognitive linguist (Gestalt psychology)
    understood functional trade-offs (tense-aspect-mood) and the role of inference
    interested in subtle but widely ramifying language-specific “patterns” (cf. Sapir)
    focus on a few languages that push the envelope
you pick your hero, I’ll pick mine