

PLIN0068 Constructed Languages

2024-25

Lecture 8: Syntax

For the syntax of your language

- No need to make syntactic rules for the entire language
- Focus on some constructions, at least:
 - i. Simple transitive sentences
 - ii. Simple intransitive sentences
 - iii. DPs (with recursion)
- Be explicit about the syntactic rules (you can, but need not, formulate them as regular or context free production rules)

Simple transitive sentences

Word order of transitive sentences

Natural languages differ in word order

- Some languages have flexible word order; other languages are more rigid
- Many languages, if not all, have a **dominant** word order (see Dryer 2007:§2; [Dryer 2013](#))
- See [Dryer 2013: Ch. 81](#) for quantitative data on simple transitive sentences

For your language

Determine how to say "[Name1] [Verb] [Name2]".

- [Verb] should be a canonical transitive verb like "saw", "met", "pushed", etc.
- SOV, SVO, VSO, VOS, OSV, OVS, or flexible word order

Optional: For 'non-canonical transitive verbs', you might have different structures (more on this later)

Dependency-marking

Once you've determined the order, also decide whether to mark grammatical dependency

- **Head-marking:** e.g. subject marking in French

Marie pouss-ait Paul

Marie push-IMP.PAST.3sg Paul

'Marie was pushing Paul'

- **Dependent-marking:** e.g. case marking in Japanese

marī-ga pōru-o osi-tei-ta

Marie-NOM Paul-ACC push-PROG-PAST

'Marie was pushing Paul'

Dependency-marking (cont.)

- Both: e.g. Russian

Maria **tolka-la** **Pola**
Maria.**NOM** push.IMP-PAST.**3SG.F** Pol.**ACC**
'Marie was pushing Paul'

- Neither, e.g. Vietnamese

Maria đẩy Paul
Maria push Paul
'Marie pushes/ed Paul'

Complex head marking

Nez Perce (Deal 2010: p. 75)

pit'íin-im páa-'yaŋ-na picpíc-ne
girl-ERG 3SUBJ.3OBJ-find-PERF cat-OBJ
'The girl found the cat'

Hungarian:

- *szeret-lek* 'love-PRES.1SGSUBJ2OBJ'
- *szeret-ek* 'love-PRES.1SGSUBJ.INDEF OBJ', *szeret-sz*, 'love-PRES.2SGSUBJ.INDEF OBJ',
- *szeret-em* 'love-PRES.1SUBJ.DEF OBJ', *szeret-ed* 'love-PRES.2SGSUBJ.DEF OBJ',

Remarks

- Dependency is not always consistently marked
 - English head-marks 3sg subject on present verbs, but not in the past
 - English dependent-marks pronouns, but no other noun phrases
 - Japanese allows case markers to drop
- Non-canonical transitive verbs
 - Object can be a PP ("listen" vs. "hear")
 - Some 'psych verbs' take Dative subject Nominative object
 - Irregular case assignment (e.g. *helfen* takes a Dative object in German)
 - Possession can be expressed by "[Nominative] be [Locative]"

Simple intransitive sentences

Word order of intransitive sentences

- According to [Dryer 2013](#) in most cases:
 - SV in SOV-SVO-OSV languages
 - VS in VSO-VOS-OVS languages
- But this correlation is not absolute, e.g.
 - Spanish is overwhelmingly SVO, but VS sentences are very common
 - Domari is overwhelmingly VS, but both SV and VS are found in transitive sentences

Ergativity

Another source of variation is **ergativity** (for dependent marking)

- Nominative-Accusative alignment
 - Transitive: Nominative-subject Accusative-object
 - Intransitive: Nominative-subject
- Ergative-Absolutive alignment
 - Transitive: Ergative-subject Absolutive-object
 - Intransitive: Absolutive-subject

(Nominative and Absolutive are often morphologically unmarked)

Ergativity: examples

Hunzib from [Comrie 2013](#) (originally from Van den Berg 1995)

kid y-ut'-ur

girl CL2-sleep-PAST

'The girl slept'

oždi-l kid hehe-r

boy-**ERG** girl hit-PAST

'The boy hit the girl'

Split ergativity

Many languages with ergative-absolute alignment also have nominative-accusative alignment

- Hindi is ergative-absolute when V is perfective, but nominative-accusative when V is imperfective
- In Georgian, only some intransitive verbs are ergative-absolute

For your language

- Determine the basic word order of intransitive sentences
- If you have dependent marking, decide whether to have Nominative-Accusative or Ergative-Absolutive alignment

Pronouns

Pronominal typology

- It's very common to mark singular vs. plural in 1st and 2nd person (Even languages that otherwise don't mark number do)
- Some languages mark
 - Duality
 - Inclusive vs. exclusive 1st

Nominative pronouns in Hawai'ian

		singular	dual	plural
1st	inclusive	—	<i>kāua</i>	<i>kākou</i>
	exclusive	<i>au</i>	<i>māua</i>	<i>mākou</i>
2nd		<i>'oe</i>	<i>'olua</i>	<i>'oukou</i>
3rd		<i>ia</i>	<i>lāua</i>	<i>lākou</i>

Augment-Minimal System

Ilocano pronouns (Bobaljik 2008, Cycsouw 2011, Harbour 2016)

		singular	dual	plural
1st	inclusive	—	<i>ta</i>	<i>tayo</i>
	exclusive	<i>co</i>	—	<i>mi</i>
2nd		<i>mo</i>	—	<i>yo</i>
3rd		<i>na</i>	—	<i>da</i>

		minimal	augmented
1st	inclusive	<i>ta</i>	<i>tayo</i>
	exclusive	<i>co</i>	<i>mi</i>
2nd		<i>mo</i>	<i>yo</i>
3rd		<i>na</i>	<i>da</i>

Pronominal syntax

Pronouns often have special morphosyntax

- Only pronouns have case distinctions in English
- French is SVO, but SOV with pronominal/clitic objects
- In Barasano, SV and VS are both possible, but pronominal S normally follows V (Dryer 2007)

For your language

You need to distinguish 1st vs. 2nd vs. 3rd

- What number categories to have?
 - Sg. vs. Pl
 - Dual?
 - Inclusive/exclusive?
- Other distinctions
 - Gender (only in 3sg in English; none in Uyghur, Hungarian)
 - Politeness (especially for 2nd person)

DPs

DP-internal material

Things to order: [Noun], [Article], [Demonstrative], [Numeral], [Adjective]

- English has fixed order: ([Article],[Demonstrative]) [Numeral] [Adjective] [Noun]
- Japanese has relatively flexible word order but [Noun] must be at the end
- If all dependents appear on the same side of the noun (as in English), the order tends to be:
 - [Demonstrative]-[Numeral]-[Adjective]-[Noun]
 - [Noun]-[Adjective]-[Numeral]-[Demonstrative]

Articles and demonstratives

- Some languages don't have articles (e.g., Cantonese, Russian)
- [Article] and [Demonstrative] can be separate, e.g.
 - *a gone yai* 'the child this' in Fijian
 - *aftos o andras* 'DEM the man'

Distinctions among demonstrative

- English distinguishes proximal and distal demonstratives (*this* vs. *that*; cf. *yon*)
- Three-way distinction in Spanish (*este* vs. *ese* vs. *aquel*), Japanese, etc.
- No (strict) distinctions in French, Greek, etc.

Adjectives

- No correlation between OV/VO and AdjN/NAdj (Dryer 2007: §7)
- In Romance languages, some adjectives are pre-nominal, others are post-nominal
- In some languages, adjectives are a subclass of verbs/predicates (Hanis Coos, Korean, Mandarin Chinese)
- Some languages seem to lack attributive adjectives altogether (e.g. Korean, Japanese) and use (reduced) relative clauses instead

Numerals

- No correlation between OV/VO and NumN/NNum (Dryer 2007)
- Some languages require classifiers with numerals; numerals and classifiers are always adjacent (either NumCl or ClNum), so no order like (Num-N-Cl)
 - Num-Cl-N in Mandarin Chinese
 - N-Num-Cl in Thai
 - Cl-Num-N in Ibibio
 - N-Cl-Num in Jingpho
 - Both Num-Cl-N and N-Num-Cl in Japanese

Possessive constructions

English uses two types of possessive constructions:

- *the book's cover* (**Saxon genitive**)
- *the cover of the book*

In French, the possessor is normally post-nominal, but pronominal possessors are pre-nominal

- *le livre de Jean* 'the book of Jean'
- *son livre* '3sg's book'

Possessor agreement

English and French are dependent marking

Uyghur is obligatorily head-marking (possessor agreement)

- (*mëning*) *kitab-im* '1sg.GEN book-1sg'
- (*sëning*) *kitab-ing* '2sg.GEN book-2sg'

For your language

- Determine how to say things like:
 - big cat/car
 - three cats/cars
 - three big cats/cars
 - these three big cats/cars
- Word order can be flexible, but state which orders are possible
- Determine how to form possessives (dependent marking and/or head marking) and where to place them; how to say e.g. *this cat's three red cars*

Summary

Homework

1. Pronominal inventory
2. Specify word order for transitive sentences, intransitive sentences, and DPs (remark if pronouns are special or not)
3. Determine dependency-marking
4. Construct 5 simple transitive and 5 intransitive sentences as examples
 - Some should contain pronouns, and some complex DPs
 - Use [the Leipzig glossing rules](#)

Presentation 2 in Week 10!

Other constructions

Optional constructions that you can discuss in your essay:

- Adverbs
- Auxiliary verbs
- Polar questions
- Wh-questions
- Relative clauses
- Modals and attitude constructions (How to embed sentences under *must*, *think*, *want* etc.)