Middlebury College

INTD0111A/ARBC0111A: The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Assignment #1 (due on Tuesday October 3 at 4:15pm in class (recommended) or by e-mail no later than 5pm)

General guidelines for answering questions on assignments[*]

Since this is your first assignment in this course, please take some time to read the following guidelines.

The goal of these assignments is to test your understanding of the materials we covered in class and in the textbook, as well as your ability to apply this understanding to new problems using the same logic and method of analysis presented and discussed in class. Therefore, it makes sense that you go over the materials (if you haven't done this already) *before* you attempt to answer the questions. If you try to answer these questions without having a full understanding of the issues at hand, it's quite unlikely that any of these questions will make much sense to you. *So, guideline #1: Read the parts of the textbook we covered, the slides on the website, and the notes you took in class before you try to answer the questions on this assignment* (or any other future assignment for that matter).

As you should have already noticed, the main object of study for linguists working on cross-linguistic comparison is typically a set of data from human languages, most of which they cannot even pronounce a word of. So, when faced with a question that includes data from an exotic language with funny-looking symbols in the phonetic representations and unfamiliar word orders, do not panic. *Guideline #2: You do not need to know the language to be able to answer the question.* (Incidentally, if you happen to know any of the languages from which some data are taken, this does not give you an advantage over someone who doesn't know the language. In fact, from my experience, knowing the language sometimes makes things more difficult or at least confusing. So,

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[*] Notice that these are guidelines for how to answer questions. For issues relating to grading, policy on delay in turning in assignments, and possibility of collaboration with your classmates on assignments, please see the relevant page on the course website:
https://segue.middlebury.edu/index.php?&site=intd0111a-f06&section=14676&action=site.

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piece of advice: If you know any of these languages, pretend that you don't know them while answering the question. Just focus on what the question asks you to do.)

Guideline #3: For data from languages other than English, make sure you read the word-by-word gloss on the second line of each example as well as the meaning translation on the third line. They're both of equal importance in answering the questions. The information you need to answer the questions is present there.

Fourth, and most importantly, while I might have some answer for each of these questions in mind, more often than not, *there is really no right answer*. I'm more interested in you showing me the logic you used to arrive at your answer, than in you giving me the answer I have in mind. In fact, I'll be more impressed if you surprise me with an innovative answer that I haven't thought of before. *So, guideline #4: Do not think about these questions in a rigid way.* There are often different ways of attacking each problem, hence different solutions. For me, what counts is the way you think about the problem and the way you support your solution with evidence from the data. If you do that, you'll get full credit for your work, even if I happen to disagree with your solution.

Oh, and did I say *"Start working on the assignment early."* Waiting till the last minute very often hurts your chances of getting a good score. These are not the kind of questions that you will be answering simply by repeating materials from the textbook or class notes. You'll have to spend some time thinking about these questions, and maybe reach one answer only to revise it again upon further thinking. So, give yourself enough time to work on these problems by starting early.

Best of luck to all.

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Assignment #1 (due on Tuesday October 3 at 4:15pm in class (recommended) or by e-mail no later than 5pm)

Instructions: This homework assignment consists of five exercises, most of which has subquestions (typically named A, B, and C). Read each exercise carefully and make sure you answer all the questions. The whole assignment is worth 100 points (and 10% of your overall grade in the course, so please turn in "neat" work). The number of points each question is worth is given next to the question.

Exercise #1: So, what are we missing?
Consider this implicational universal:

(1) "If a language has noun before demonstrative, then it has noun before relative clause."

Just to remind you, demonstratives are words like "*this*" and "*that*" in English phrases such as "*this book*" and "*that girl*". Relative clauses are clauses which modify a noun (i.e., add information about the noun), and in English are typically introduced by relative pronouns such as "*who*" and "*which*" (e.g., the bracketed material in *"the man [who your sister dated]"* and *"the book [which your father wrote]" are relative clauses*). Now, given the universal in (1), **answer questions A, B, and C below**:

   A. First, construct a table of the possible and impossible types of human languages predicted by this universal, along the lines we did in class for other language universals.   (5 points)

   B. After you've constructed the table, consider the data in (2-4) from the three different languages named "*alpha*, *beta*, and *gamma*", and then match each language to the corresponding "type" in the table you created in answering question A. Make sure you explain your choice by providing supporting evidence from the data.   (10 points)

Language alpha (Note: 3sg = third person singular)
(2) a. nrâ   ta   traìki   nrâ   moo   nrâ   fi   ghe   mê   giwe
        3sg   hit   dog   subject   man   3sg   go   from to.here mountain
        "the man who came from the mountain hit the dog"
    b. moo   hòrrò   ha
        the   prayer   this
         "this prayer (going on now)"

Language beta

    (3) a.   anchige   thuŋɛtchugebɛn   thi:
              we (both)   drank   miller beer
              "the miller beer which we drank"
        b.   khɛŋ   nɛpphu   cumha
              these   two   friends
               "these two friends"

Language gamma (this one looks familiar, doesn't it?)

    (4) a. the poor linguist who had to transcribe all these sentences
       b. this language

  C. Based on your answers from A and B above, are the predictions made by the implicational universal in (1) borne out in human languages? If yes, how? If not, why not?   (5 points)

Exercise #2: Which way is your language headed?

Consider the following examples from a West African language (to remain anonymous until I post the solutions):

    (5) a.   à   lā   saká lī
              we   have   rice   eaten
              "We have eaten rice."
        b. à   lì   saká
              we   eat   rice
              "We eat rice."

As you can see from the two sentences above, the position of the verb with regard to the object varies in this language: sometimes the verb follows the object NP (as in 5a), sometimes it precedes it (as in 5b). Now*, answer questions A, B, and C, below:*

  A. Suppose we assumed that this is a head-final language, how can we analyze the contrast between (5a) and (5b) now? Additionally, does this language pose any problems for the parametric approach as explained in class and discussed by Baker in your textbook?   (10 points)

  B. Suppose, instead, we assumed that this is a head-initial language, how can we analyze the contrast between (5a) and (5b) now? Do the problems (if any) associated with the first solution still hold?   (10 points)

  C. Looking now at the solutions from Questions A and B to the contrast in (5), which one do you prefer? Why?   (5 points)

Exercise #3: Relentless parents or relentless children?

As you should've noticed, the "cognitivist" approach to language acquisition that we discussed in class stands in contrast to the "behaviorist" approach of the early half of the 20th century, which assumed that human beings are born "blank slates" and that language is learned in a response-to-stimulus fashion, coupled with reinforcement. Consider the following child-parent exchanges, and then answer the question that follows:

Exchange #1 (from McNeill 1966):

Child: Nobody don't like me.
Parent: No, say 'nobody likes me.'
Child: Nobody don't like me.
    [*repeats eight times*]
Parent; No, now listen carefully; say 'nobody likes me.'
Child: Oh! Nobody don't likes me.

Exchange #2 (from Braime 1971):

Child: Want other one spoon, daddy.
Parent: You mean, you want the other spoon.
Child: Yes, I want other one spoon, please Daddy.
Parent: Can you say 'the other spoon'?
Child: Other…one…spoon
Parent: Say 'other'
Child: Other
Parent: 'Spoon'
Child: Spoon
Parent: 'Other spoon'
Child: Other…spoon. Now give me other one spoon?

Question

How do these child-parent exchanges bear on the cognitivist-behaviorist debate? Explain your answer. (15 points)

Exercise #4: Does Harry believe that Sam likes zibun?

In class we discussed how English and Japanese differ with regard to basic word order. Another difference between these two languages appears in sentences with *anaphors*, i.e., elements such as reflexive pronouns in English (e.g., *herself*, *themselves*), and *zibun* (="self") in Japanese, whose interpretation requires the presence of a preceding NP in the sentence. The interpretation of anaphors, however, seems to differ in the two languages, as the two sentences in (6a) and (6b) below illustrate (**<u>Very important Note</u>**: To indicate

co-reference between an anaphor and an NP in the sentence, linguists typically use identical subscripts on both, as in *Mary$_i$ likes herself$_i$*):

English:
(6) a. John$_i$ said that Bill$_j$ hates himself$_{*i/j}$.
Japanese:
b. Satoo$_i$-ga Tanaka$_j$-ga zibun$_{i/j}$-o nikunde-iru koto-o hanasita
    Satoo-SU Tanaka-OB self-OB hates fact-OB said
    "Satoo$_i$ said that Tanaka$_j$ hates him$_i$/himself$_j$."

(Important Note: Don't forget that an asterisk indicates ungrammaticality, which in these examples would mean the unavailability of a certain interpretation for the anaphor.)

Now, answer questions A, B, and C below:

A. First, state in your own words what kind of difference exists between English and Japanese on the basis of the two sentences in (6a) and (6b)?   (5 points)

B. Second, suggest a parameter for anaphor interpretation that would distinguish English and similar languages (e.g., Arabic) from Japanese and similar languages (e.g., Korean).   (5 points)

C. Third, on the assumption that children have access only to "positive evidence" but not to "negative evidence" in the primary linguistic data (that is, they have access to which anaphor interpretations are possible in their language, but they do not have access to which anaphor interpretations are impossible), how do you think children acquiring English and Japanese manage to correctly set the value of the parameter you suggested in your answer to B above? (*Hint*: Do you think it is feasible to assume that kids start with one setting and then change it later? If so, which setting would they start with in this case, the English setting or the Japanese setting? Why?)

                                                                            (10 points)

Exercise #5: Can you speak Japenenglish?

The analysis of word order variation in human languages in terms of the head directionality parameter that we discussed in class worked well for English and Japanese. Unfortunately, things are not as neat as we would have wanted. Japenenglish-type languages do actually seem to exist. Two of these languages are German and Dutch (and

perhaps the anonymous language from *Exercise #1*). First, consider the data in (7) and (8), from German and Dutch, respectively:

(7) a.   Hans   schlug   den   Ball
             Hans   hit   the   Ball
             "Hans hit the ball."

    b.   Schlug   Hans   den   Ball?
             hit   Hans   the   Ball
             "Did Hans hit the ball."

    c.   Ich   denke   daß   Hans   den   Ball   geschlangen   hat
             I   think   that   Hans   the   Ball   hit   has
             "I think that Hans hit the ball."

(8) a.   De   kat   drinkt   melk
             the   cat   drinks   milk
             "The cat drinks milk."

    b.   Waarom   drinkt   de   kat   melk?
             why   drinks   the   cat   milk
             "Why does the cat drink milk?"

    c.   Ik   zie   dat   de   kat   melk   drinkt
             I   see   that   the   cat   milk   drinks
             "I see that the cat drinks milk."

Now, answer questions A and B below:

A. How does the data above pose a problem for the head directionality (HD) parametric approach? In light of all the parameters that we discussed in class, what is a possible way to account for the German and Dutch data without being forced to abandon the HD parameter altogether?

<div align="right">(10 points)</div>

B. Now, given your solution from A, consider the further data in (9a) and (9b) from German and Dutch, respectively:

(9) a.   auf dem Tisch
            on   the   table

    b.   op de berg
            on   the   mountain

Does the solution you arrived at in A above still hold? If not, can you think of another solution that is still compatible with the HD parameter? If you do, what kind of problem(s) (if any) would that solution entail to the parametric approach?

<div align="right">(10 points)</div>