INTD0111A/ARBC0111A

The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #13
Oct 26th, 2006

Announcements

- Anyone still without a LAP partner?
- Reference grammars for LAP languages?
- Midterm due today at the end of the class.

Wrap-up: Why Parameters?

- This is what Baker discusses in most of Chapter 7 (pp. 199-216).
- Main Question: Why is language that way?
- Two common answers: Cultural and evolutionary.

Language diversity as an aspect of cultural diversity

- Pretty much the view outside of formal linguistics, mainly in the humanities and social sciences.
- "Differences" are more emphasized and highlighted. Sameness is unexpected and ignored. If cultures differ, and language is part of culture, then languages have to be different.

But, …

- We have seen how totally unrelated languages are similar:

  Japanese, Basque, Turkish, Navajo, Quechua, Malayalam, Greenlandic Eskimo, and New Guinean languages, are all head-final.

  English, Edo, Arabic, French, Thai, Swahili, Zapotec, Russian, Indonesian, are all head-initial.
- Edo, Khmer, and Sranan all have serial verbs.
- etc.

Same culture, but different languages

- Also, culture may be the same, but the languages differ: Northern vs. southern tribes in Australia. Same culture, different polysynthesis properties.
- Some Mohawks speak their language, but others do not. Still, they all represent the same culture.

Linguistic variation is limited

- Edward Sapir: "Language is a human activity that varies without assignable limit."
- But we know now this is false. The range of variation available to human language is actually very limited, and can be expressed in terms of a finite number of universal principles and binary options that we called parameters.

Linguistic variation is systematic

- Variation is also systematic, not random. Why would Mohawk go polysynthetic and exhibit the properties it does, even though the probably related Siouan languages would not do the same? Is this a cultural decision? How?

Language as a product of evolutionary biology

- Survival? Better life? Mastodon hunting?

  But, …
- How can a DNA sequence induce an abstract system like language?
- Why is it unique to our species?
- Is there a museum of fossilized verbs and complementizers that I can visit?

Language as a product of evolutionary biology

- Three kinds of humans:

  Homo rigidus, with a completely fixed grammar in their genome.

  Homo whateverus, whose genome did not specify any principles of grammar.

  Homo parametrus, whose genome specified many fixed principles but also left some options open.
- Who would have the advantage?

Language as a product of evolutionary biology

- *Homo whateverus* will probably be at a disadvantage and should eventually go extinct.
- *Homo parametrus* might look like it has an advantage of allowing a certain level of flexibility to accommodate the variation in human environments and ecosystems.
- But we have already seen that this is false. Languages with same parametric settings exist in different environments and ecosystems.

Language as a product of evolutionary biology

- So, if there is no inherent difference in the biological value of potential languages, mathematically, there is a selection pressure to reduce the number of languages that can be learned. As a result, …
- *Homo rigidus* should have the advantage, and linguistic diversity is not predicted. ☹

Solidarity, kin identification?

- Maybe language evolved to promote "group solidarity".
- But do we need parameters for that? Wouldn't a difference in accent just do?
- And why do children like to learn language from their peers rather than their parents? No sense of "family"?

Ok, I know why parameters exist …

- Maybe parameters were just an accident?
- Maybe not!

So, …

- What's the answer to the question "*Why Parameters?*"?
- Something like,

  "We don't have a clue."

  But, …
- We will revisit this issue again when we discuss language change.

Aspects of morphological typology

- In the rest of this lecture, we go quickly over some aspects of cross-linguistic variation in morphology that might be helpful to you as you work on your LAP language.
- Whaley's book is a good simplified source for most of these issues. So use it, when needed for your LAP project.

Alignment/Case and Agreement systems

- We have already talked about two types of case and agreement systems: nominative-accusative, and ergative-absolutive.
- Notice, though, that some languages may have a "split" system, where they use nominative-accusative in some contexts, and ergative-absolutive in others.

Split systems

- Split systems may be based on the type of predicate in the sentence (as in Eastern Pomo), tense and aspect (as in Georgian), or whether the subject is an NP or a pronoun (as in Dyirbal). See next slides for examples.
- If your LAP language has a split system, indicate that, and indicate the basis for the split.

Eastern Pomo

Xá:su:là **wí** ko:khóya rattlesnake 1sg bit “A rattlesnake bit me.”	**Há:** mí:pal śá:ka 1sg him killed “I killed him.”
Wí qa:láma 1sg sick “I got sick.”	**Há:** xá:qkákki 1sg bathe “I bathed.”

Georgian

Student-**i** midis student-**CM** goes “The student goes.”	Student-**i** ceril-**s** cers student-**CM** letter-**CM** writes “The student writes the letter.”
Student-**i** mivida student-**CM** went “The student went.”	Student-**ma** ceril-**i** dacera student-**CM** letter-**CM** wrote “The student wrote the letter.”

Dyirbal

a. ŋuma banaga-ɲu
   father return-PAST
   “Father returned.”
b. yabu ŋuma-**ŋgu** bura-n
   mother father-**ERG** see-PAST
   “Father saw mother.”

Dyirbal

ŋana banaga-ɲu 1pl return-PAST “We returned.”	ŋura banaga-ɲu 2pl return-PAST “You returned.”
ŋura ŋana-**na** bura-n 2pl 1pl-**CM** see-PAST “You saw us.”	ŋana ŋura-**na** bura-n 1pl 2pl-**CM** see-PAST “We saw you.”

Animacy effects on agreement

- The animacy of a nominal may have effects on the morphology and syntax of a language.
- For example, in Tangut (Tibeto-Burman: extinct), verb agreement operates according to a “1st person > 2nd person > other” hierarchy:

  ni tɪn nga ɪn ldɪə thɪ-**nga** ku that tsɪ viəthɪ-**na**
  2s if 1s ACC indeed chase-1 then 3s also chase-2
  “If indeed you are chasing me, then chase her too.”

Animacy effects on word order

- Also, word order can be sensitive to animacy in some languages. For example, in Sesotho, more animate NP objects have to precede less animate NP objects:
  a. ke-phehétesé ngoaná lijó
     1s-cooked child food
     “I cooked the child food.”
  b. *ke-phehétesé lijó ngoaná
     1s-cooked food child
     Intended meaning: “I cooked food to the child.”

Animacy effects on Case

- Animacy may also affect case marking. In Malayalam (Dravidian) animate objects take accusative case, but inanimate objects take nominative.
  a. awal awane kantu
     she-nom him-acc saw
     "She saw him"
  b. awal pustakan kantu
     she-nom book-nom saw
     "She saw the book."

Definiteness

- We have seen before how definiteness has an effect on agreement in Swahili.
- Hebrew shows a similar effect with regard to *et-* marking:
  a. ha-ish koteb dahar
     the-man write word
     "The man is writing a word."
  b. ha-ish shomer et-ha-torah
     the-man observe def-the-law
     "The man is observing the law."

Gender

- Languages may show gender marking on nouns and pronouns, as in many Indo-European languages.
- But some languages also show verb agreement in gender as well, e.g., Russian:

  babuška čitala (= Grandmother was reading)

  čelovek čital (= The man was reading.)

Verbal categories: Tense

- Tense can be defined as a relation of event time to speech time.
- The main distinctions are between past and non-past, or future and non-future, though some languages will have finer-grained distinctions within "past" or "future".

Tense

- English:
  a. I work$_{Ø}$. (present)
  b. I work***ed***. (past)
  c. I ***will*** work. (future)
- Lithuanian:
  a. dirb-***u*** "I work"
  b. dirb-***au*** "I worked"
  c. dirb-***siu*** "I will work"

Tense

- Some languages do not mark tense on the verb. Rather they use time expressions and modality markers for that. Burmese is an example:
  a. sãneineì-taìñ mye? hpya?-te
     Saturday-every grass cut-REAL
     "He cuts the grass every Saturday."

Tense

b. da-caúñmoú mã-la-ta
that-because not-come-REAL
"because of that they didn't come."

c. mãneʔhpañ sá-me
tomorrow begin-IRR
"We will begin tomorrow."

Tense

- Chibemba (Bantu) changes the verb to indicate if the event took place before yesterday, yesterday, earlier today, or if it just happened. And it has a similarly fine-grained scale for future as well:

Chibemba past tense system

a. Remote past (before yesterday):
Ba-àlí-bomb-ele "they worked"
b. Removed past (yesterday):
Ba-àlíí-bomba "they worked"
c. Near past (earlier today):
Ba-àcí-bomba "they worked"
d. Immediate past (just happened) :
Ba-á-bomba "they worked"

Chibemba future tense system

a. Immediate future (very soon):
Ba-álàá-bomba "they"ll work"
b. Near future (later today):
Ba-léé-bomba "they"ll work"
c. Removed future (tomorrow):
Ba-kà-bomba "they"ll work"
d. Remote future (after tomorrow):
Ba-ká-bomba "they"ll work"

Aspect

- Aspect has to do with the internal temporal structure of an event, e.g., whether it temporally bounded or not.
Perfective aspect: "He wrote three letters."
Imperfective (= habitual) aspect: "He writes letters."
Progressive aspect: "He is writing letters."
And others: Inceptive, Iterative, Inchoative.

Aspect

- Some languages like Russian express aspect by means of verbal affixes:
Ja čitál "I was reading"
Ja **pro**čitál "I (did) read"
- Other languages like Finnish use case-marking (accusative vs. partitive) to signal aspect:
Hän luki kirj**an**$_{ACC}$ "He read the book"
Hän luki kirja**a**$_{PART}$ 'He was reading the book'.

Mood

- Mood is a grammatical category through which speakers of a language can indicate whether they believe that an event or a state actually occurs, does not occur, or had the potential to occur.

Mood

- *Indicative* mood asserts the truth of a proposition, e.g., "It is raining."
- *Subjunctive* mood typically indicates an attitude of uncertainty on the part of the speaker or a hypothetical situation, e.g., "It is essential that it rain."
- Commands are said to be in the *imperative* mood.

Modality

- Modality has to do with obligation/desire (deontic), or with degrees of possibility (epistemic) regarding an event.

  John must come tomorrow.

  We really should go now.

  vs.

  John must have left the door open.

  My guess is that it should rain tomorrow.

Evidentials

- Some languages indicate epistemic modality by means of morphological markers, called evidentials, e.g., Tuyuca (Brazil and Colombia):

  a. díga apé-***wi***

  soccer play-VISUAL

  "He played soccer (I saw him)."

Evidentials

b. díga apé-***ti***

soccer play-NON-VISUAL

"He played soccer (I heard him playing)."

c. díga apé-***yi***

soccer play-APPARENT

"He played soccer (I have evidence but I didn't actually witness the game in any way)."

Evidentials

d. díga apé-***yigi***

soccer play-SECONDHAND

"He played soccer (Someone told me)."

e. díga apé-***hiyi***

soccer play-ASSUMED

"He played soccer (It seems reasonable that he did)."

Next class agenda

- We start talking about language change. I will put something on reserve for you to read and I will send a note about that.