Middlebury College

INTD0111A/ARBC0111A: The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

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General guidelines for answering questions on assignments

Before attempting to answer the questions on each assignment for 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, 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.)

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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.

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.