

## INTD0111A

# The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #11  
March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## Announcements

- **Reminder:**
- The third talk in the “Language Works” series is today at 4:30pm, in RAJ conference room.
- Talk is given by Hannah Washington (U of Texas, Midd ’08).

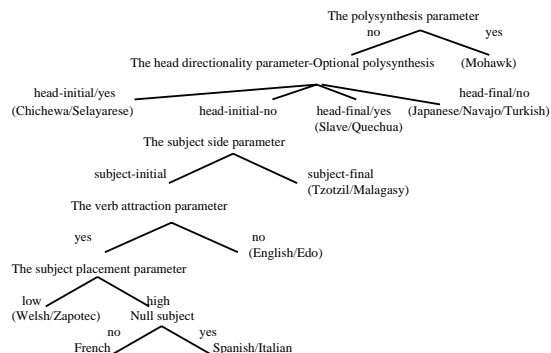
## Announcements

- Midterm is officially assigned today. It’s due this Friday by 11:30am, either via e-mail or in hard copy in my mailbox at Farrell House.
- Delay penalty applies. No extensions will be given. I won’t be back to campus until March 30<sup>th</sup>, so if I don’t get your midterm on time, that means I won’t get it at all.

## Baker’s parameter hierarchy (PH)

- Let’s start today’s class by having a look at Baker’s parameter hierarchy so far:

### Baker’s PH (3<sup>rd</sup> version)



Evidence for the PH from verb serialization.

### When verbs come in sequence

- Compare Edo (Niger-Congo) with English:
  - a. Ozo ghá lè èvbàré khièn  
Ozo will cook food sell  
“Ozo will cook the food and sell it.”
  - b. Ozo ghá suà àkhé dè  
Ozo will push pot fall  
“Ozo will push the pot down [literally, so that it falls].”

### When verbs come in sequence

- Similar to Edo are Sranan and Saramaccan (both are English-based Creoles spoken in Suriname):
  - c. Kofi naki Amba kiri (Sranan)  
Kofi hit Amba kill  
“Kofi struck Amba dead.”
  - d. a bi fèfi di wòsu kabà (Saramaccan)  
he Tense paint the house finish  
“He had painted the house already.”

### When verbs come in sequence

- Structures such as those in (a-d) in Edo, Sranan, and Saramaccan, are called *serial verb constructions*, because verbs in such constructions can follow one another in a serial order without the need to use connecting elements such as “and” or repeating the object with each verb.
- So, maybe it’s another parameter:

### The serial verb parameter

- “Only one verb can be contained in each VP (as in English), or more than one verb can be contained in a single VP (as in Edo).”

### The serial verb parameter

- But do you notice something about those languages that allow verb serialization?
- Right. They either mark tense with a separate word or do not mark it at all.
- Hmmm ... Is that a coincidence?

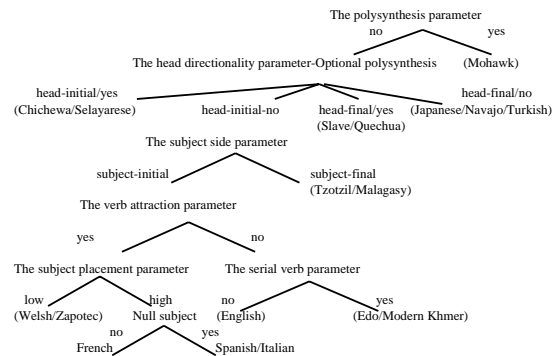
### The serial verb parameter

- For Baker, this means that the serial verb parameter and the verb attraction parameter are incompatible.
- This follows from the parameter hierarchy if the verb attraction parameter outranks the serial verb parameter.

## Verb serialization in Khmer

- Further evidence for the incompatibility between verb attraction and verb serialization comes from the Khmer languages.
- Eric Schiller notes that Proto-Khmer was originally a VSO language. It gave rise to the two modern languages of Ravua, which is still VSO, and Modern Khmer, which is SVO. Interestingly for the verb serialization phenomenon, only Modern Khmer developed serial verb constructions, but not Ravua.

## Baker's PH (4<sup>th</sup> version)



## Any remarks on the PH?

- Subject placement and English: How does English have access to the subject placement parameter?
- Null subjects and polysynthesis: The PH makes it look like these are unrelated, contrary to what Baker was suggesting earlier when talking about subject and object drop in Mohawk.

## Any remarks on the PH?

- Also, there is paucity of parametric options on the right side of the hierarchy.
- But this is just a result of our so far Indo-European-centric approach to cross-linguistic diversity.
- Polysynthetic languages as well as head-final languages also exhibit parametric variation. We discuss some of these next.

## So, how does your language treat adjectives?

- For instance, polysynthetic languages differ with regard to how they treat adjectives.
- Mohawk seems to treat adjectives as verbs:  
Thikv kanuhsa' ka-rakv-hen'  
that house it-white-past  
"That house used to be white."

## So, how does your language treat adjectives?

- Mayali, however, seems to treat adjectives as nouns instead:  
Kandiwo mankuyeng!  
you/me-give long  
"Give me long."

### So, how does your language treat adjectives?

- Interestingly, languages that treat adjectives as nouns will exhibit the so-called “*discontinuous structure*” phenomenon (which Baker calls “split noun phrases”), as in the following example, again from Mayali:

namarngorl gagarrme nagimiuk  
barramundi he-catch big  
“He’s catching a big barramundi.”

### The Adjective Neutralization Parameter

- To account for this difference between polysynthetic languages, Baker proposes the *Adjective Neutralization Parameter*:  
“Adjectives are treated as a kind of verb,  
or  
Adjectives are treated as a kind of noun.”

### Alignment (aka case and agreement) systems

- A second area of parametric variation relevant to languages on the right side of the parameter hierarchy has to do with the so-called *alignment systems* (more known as case and agreement systems) in dependent-marking languages.

### Alignment (aka case and agreement) systems: Japanese

- Consider the following sentence from Japanese, for example:  
John-**ga** Mary-**ni** hon-**o** yatta  
John-**SU** Mary-**IOB** book-**DOB** gave  
“John gave Mary a book.”
- As you can see, each NP in the Japanese sentence appears with a marker at the end indicating what role the NP plays in the sentence. Each of these markers is called a “case”.
- So, subject NPs appear with *nominative* case; object NPs appear with *accusative* case; and indirect objects appear with *dative* case.

### Alignment (aka case and agreement) systems: Japanese

- Notice, crucially, however, that in intransitive clauses (those without an object), the case marker on the subject of a Japanese sentence remains the same (i.e., *-ga*):  
John-**ga** Kobe-ni itta  
John-**NOM** Kobe-to went  
“John went to Kobe.”

### Alignment (aka case and agreement) systems: Greenlandic

- As it turns out, within head-final languages, there are languages with a different case system.
- Compare, for example, the case marking in the following transitive and intransitive sentences from Greenlandic Eskimo (CM stands for “case marker”):

### Alignment (aka case and agreement) systems: Greenlandic

- a. Juuna-**p** atuaga-**q** miiqa-**nut** nassiuppaa  
Juuna-CM book-CM child-CM send  
“Juuna sent a book to the children.”
  
- b. atuaga-**q** tikissimanngilaq  
book-CM hasn't come  
“A book hasn't come yet.”

### Alignment (aka case and agreement) systems: Greenlandic

- What do you notice here?
- The subject of an intransitive clause carries the same case marker as the object of a transitive clause. Such case is typically referred to as “*absolute*,” as opposed to the “*ergative*” case marker on the subject of a transitive verb.
  
- Greenlandic has a different alignment of case markers than Japanese then. We call Japanese-type languages “*nominative-accusative*” languages. And we call Greenlandic-type languages “*ergative-absolute*” languages.

### The Ergative Case Parameter

- To capture this cross-linguistic difference, Baker suggests an “*Ergative case parameter*”:

“The case marker on all subjects is the same (Japanese, Turkish, and Quechua),

or

The case marker on the subject of an intransitive verb is the same as the case marker on the object of a transitive verb (Greenlandic, Dyirbal, Basque).”

### The topic-prominent parameter

- Another parametric difference that Baker claims to be relevant only to head-final languages is what he calls the “*topic-prominent parameter*”, which distinguishes languages like Japanese from languages like English:

“A sentence may be made of an initial NP (the topic) followed by a complete clause that is understood as a comment on that topic (Japanese).

or,

No topic phrase distinct from the clause is allowed (English).”

### Japanese again!

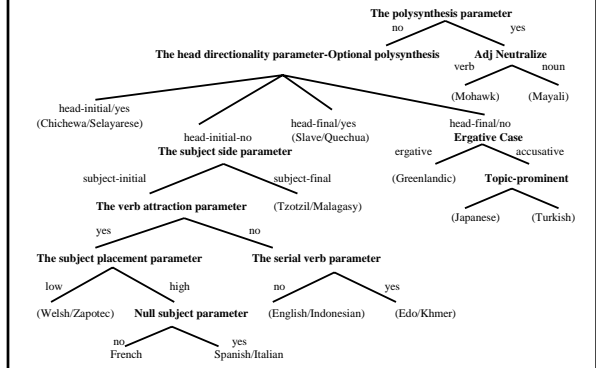
- Consider, for example, the following Japanese sentences:

- a. John *wa* sono hon-o yonda  
John **TOPIC** that book-OB read  
“Speaking of John, he read that book.”
- b. Kono hon *wa* John-ga yonda  
this book **TOPIC** John-SU read  
“Speaking of this book, John has read it.”
- c. Sakana *wa* tai-ga oisii  
fish **TOPIC** red-snapper-SU is-delicious  
“Speaking of fish, red snapper is delicious.”

### The topic-prominent parameter

- Baker further claims that the topic-prominent parameter is only relevant to nominative-accusative languages, and not to ergative-absolute languages.
- Incorporating all these new parameters into his parameter hierarchy, we now have a final version of the hierarchy:

### Baker's parameter hierarchy (final version)



### One more parameter

- One area of linguistic diversity that we touched on in class discussions has to do with interrogative structures.
- Let's consider linguistic diversity here.

### Variation in wh-questions

- Languages differ in the way they form *wh-questions* (i.e., questions starting with words like *who, what, which*, etc., in English).
- English-type languages always front *wh-words* to the beginning of the sentence:
  - Who did you see?
  - \*Did you see who? (bad on a non-echo reading)

### Variation in wh-questions

- Japanese, however, does not front its *wh-words*. Rather, these words stay in their position in the sentence. We say they stay “*in situ*”:
- John-ga dare-o butta ka?  
 John-SU who-OB hit Q-marker  
 “Who did John hit?”

### The wh-parameter

- This seems like another instance of parameterization: “In some languages *wh-words* move to the front of the sentence (English); in others *wh-words* stay “*in situ*” (Japanese).”
- Baker calls this the “question movement parameter”. Let's call it the *wh-parameter*, for short.

### The wh-parameter

- So, where does the *wh-parameter* sit on the parameter hierarchy?
- The *wh-parameter* seems independent of other parameters in the parameter hierarchy. In particular, it seems relevant for both polysynthetic and non-polysynthetic languages, head-initial and head-final languages. Baker, therefore, suggests that it exists at the same level as the head directionality and optional polysynthesis parameters.

## **Next class**

- Read Baker's last chapter. It's a non-technical wrap-up, but has interesting contrasts of the formalist approach against other approaches to the study of language.
- Some miscellaneous aspects of cross-linguistic morphological variation (Read Payne Chapter 8 on grammatical relations).
- Questions on midterm.