

- Languages of the World

#2 - **PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEM**

In order to analyze the phonological system of a language, a detailed examination of the distributional and contrastive properties of individual sounds is necessary to determine which groups of sounds represent phonemes. For this assignment, I am assuming that you will not do this yourself but will be able to rely on sources which supply this information for you.

Part 1: Vowel System

Determine the number of vowel phonemes in the phonological system of the language you are working with. Use phonetic symbols (IPA)--~~not the spelling system of the language--~~to represent these, and present them on a chart. You can follow the standard outline of the vowel space given below to do this.

	front	central	back
high			
mid			
low			

If the language has a series of long vowels as well as a series of short vowels, present these on a separate chart. Do likewise if the language has a series of nasal vowels as well as a series of oral vowels.

Below is a list of some of the typological and universal properties of vowel systems. Compare them to the basic (short, oral) vowel system in your language and comment on whether or not it conforms to each of these statements. (Form complete, coherent sentences which demonstrate that you understand the statements and have applied them to your language, i.e., don't just write "yes" or "no.")

1. All languages have /i a u/.
2. A contrast between five basic vowel qualities is the norm for human language, and in general, the most common systems are those with close to this number of basic vowels.
3. The number of height distinctions in a system is typically equal to or greater than the number of backness distinctions.

4. The number of height distinctions in front vowels is equal to or greater than the number in back vowels.

5. The number of vowels in a nasal vowel system is equal to or less than the number of oral vowels in the corresponding oral vowel system.

6. If a nasal vowel system is smaller than the corresponding oral vowel system, it is most often a mid vowel that is missing in the nasal system.

(Adapted from John Crothers, 1978, 'Typology and Universals in Vowel Systems,' in Universals of Human Language, vol. 2, Greenberg, Ferguson, and Moravcsik, eds., 93-152.)

Part 2: Consonant System

Present a chart showing the consonant system of your language. The chart should be divided into points of articulation across the top and manners of articulation down the side, as indicated below. If your language has any additional manners or places of articulation, you should add them to the chart as appropriate.

labial dental alveolar palatal velar pharyngeal

stops

vclss

vcd

fricative

vclss

vcd

affricates

vclss

vcd

nasals

liquids

glides

Below is a list of some of the typological and universal properties of obstruent (stop, fricative, affricate) systems. Compare them to the obstruent system in your language and comment on whether or not it conforms to each of these statements. (Follow directions on style mentioned above for vowels.)

1. There is a general tendency to fill the three basic articulatory regions (labial, dento-alveolar, velar) with consonants.

2. There is a tendency toward a balanced paradigmatic system (i.e., when a contrast [e.g., voiced vs. voiceless, etc.] is made in one of the three basic areas [labial, dento-alveolar, velar], it is made in all of them).

3. More contrasts (i.e., more phonemes) will be found in the dento-alveolar region than at any other point of articulation.

4. If "gaps" occur in the obstruent system, the most frequent gaps are:

(i) voiced velar obstruents (i.e., if a voiced stop is missing, it is most likely to be /g/)

(ii) voiceless labial obstruents (i.e., if a voiceless stop is missing, it is most likely to be /p/)

~~5. If one of the basic stop positions is empty, then the corresponding fricative position will be filled (e.g., if /p/ is missing, then /f/ or /ɸ/ will be present; if /g/ is missing, then /ɣ/ will be present).~~

(Adapted from Thomas Gamkrelidze, 1978, 'On the Correlation of Stops and Fricatives in a Consonant System', in Universals of Human Language, vol. 2, Greenberg, Ferguson, and Moravcsik, eds., 9-46.)

Note: It is understood that some of the statements above will not be relevant to your language. For these statements, state why the statement is not applicable. E.g., "Consonant statement #5 is not applicable to language X because all basic stop positions are filled." It is also possible that terminology other than that used in class or readings will be used in the materials you consult. If this is a difficult problem for presenting your phonology profile, check with me.

State complete bibliographical information in footnotes or endnotes following the style manual you have adopted.

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#3 - **MORPHOLOGICAL SYSTEM**

In order to give a brief sketch of the morphology of your language, this assignment will concentrate on three major lexical (=word) categories (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives). Not all languages distinguish adjectives from nouns and/or verbs, and not all languages use morphological marking to the same extent, so to make the assignment approximately even for all students, the questions will concentrate on how certain semantic distinctions are expressed, whether or not their expression is represented by affixation or by function words. For each section, document the sources which you use to answer the questions, providing specific page numbers and using the style system which you have designated.

Part 1: Nouns

1. **Case** - How are the grammatical relations of subject and direct object expressed in the language? If they are expressed by word order, state this but leave your discussion for the word order assignment. If they are expressed by case marking (either affixation or function words [adpositions]), say so and show this with examples. If the language has different declensions for case marking, as in the case of Russian, give samples from each declension and comment on how membership in the declension is determined.
2. **Number** - How is number expressed for nouns in this language? How many number distinctions (e.g., singular, dual, trial, plural) are made? Give examples.
3. **Noun classes or genders** - Are gender distinctions marked morphologically in the language? If so, how many genders are distinguished? Do these distinctions represent natural gender (i.e., biological gender) or grammatical gender or some combination of both? Give examples for each point.
4. **Noun classifiers** - Does the language have noun classifiers, like Jacalteco? If so, give a list of the classifiers and what category/categories of nouns are associated with each.

Part 2: Verbs

1. Tense/Aspect - How are tense and/or aspect expressed in the language? Give verb paradigms to show what the system looks like if tense/aspect is expressed through affixation. If it is expressed with function words, give the function words and their uses. Note: It is not necessary to compare the system to English; you may use whatever terms your source uses.

2. Agreement/Cross-reference - Are agreement categories of the subject (person, number, gender, noun class) marked on the verb? If not, you can relax. If so, indicate which categories and give examples to show this. Note: This may repeat some of the information from verb paradigms given in the first question; if so, simply refer to the appropriate distinctions in those paradigms.

Are agreement categories of the object (or objects) marked on the verb? If not, relax; if so, follow the same procedure as for subject.

3. Voice - Does the verb mark voice (e.g., English verbs distinguish active forms [ate, broke, etc.] from passive forms [was eaten, was broken, etc.])? If so, give examples.

4. Other information - Indicate what other information (if any) is marked on verbs (e.g., in Jacaltec, directionals are marked on the verb). Give examples.

Part 3: Adjectives

1. The category adjective - Does your adopted language have a category of adjectives? Look carefully, because sometimes writers of grammars mistakenly assume that all languages have such a category and don't notice that the words in this category are treated by the language exactly like either nouns or verbs (e.g., in Hausa, many words corresponding to English adjectives are really nouns, and good grammars distinguish these from "true" adjectives). Look particularly carefully in African and American Indian languages. If you can't find a separate category of adjectives, indicate how concepts corresponding to English adjectives are expressed (e.g., English 'he is tall' might be expressed nominally by 'he has tallness' and 'the tall man' might be expressed as 'the man who has tallness', or it might be expressed verbally as 'he tall's' or 'the man who tall's'). Give examples.

2. Agreement - If the language has a category of adjectives, are the adjectives marked morphologically with any categories of the nouns they modify (i.e., do they agree with the modified nouns in case, number, gender, noun class)? If so, give examples to show this.

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#4 - **PERSONAL PRONOUN SYSTEM**

Personal pronouns are traditionally divided into three persons: 1st person = speaker, 2nd person = hearer, and 3rd person = other. In addition to distinctions in person (all languages apparently distinguish speaker from hearer from other), pronouns often show distinctions in gender or class, number (with a possible inclusive-exclusive distinction in non-singular forms), social status, and case.

1. Give the forms of the free (i.e., non-clitic) person pronouns on a chart organized as below. If the pronouns show case distinctions, use the forms for subject on this chart. Include distinctions in number, gender, social status, and inclusive/ exclusive.

Number (Indicate number relevant to your lg.)

Person

1

2

3

- a. Note and discuss the number distinctions.
- b. Note and discuss the gender or class distinctions (if relevant).
- c. Note and discuss the inclusive/exclusive distinction (if relevant).
- d. Are any of the pronominal forms sensitive to the social status of speaker and hearer? If so, discuss the distinctions made, and how the forms are used.

2. Case (if relevant) - Does your language show case distinctions in the personal pronouns? If so, compare the subject and object forms of independent pronouns; you may wish to construct another chart like that given above for the object forms. Comment on whether the case distinctions made in the pronoun system are the same as those in the noun system.

3. Clitic pronouns (if relevant) - Some languages make a distinction between pronouns which appear anywhere a noun can appear in a sentence and dependent or clitic pronouns which are restricted in their location; the two places where they appear are either attached to or incorporated into the verbal morphology, or placed after the first syntactic constituent of a sentence (less common). If your language has such dependent pronouns, indicate where they appear and give a chart showing the subject form (if relevant) and the object

form (if relevant). If you are unsure if your language has such pronouns, consult with me.

4. Possessive pronouns - How is pronominal possession expressed? In some languages, possessive pronouns (sometimes called possessive adjectives when used with a noun) have different forms than subject pronouns (e.g., in English, I = subject pronoun; my = possessive pronoun [actually, determiner] when used with a possessed noun, mine with used without a possessed noun). If the possessive pronoun forms are different than the subject forms, give a chart showing what they are like; if they are the same, give examples to illustrate this.

Some languages distinguish the possessive constructions between whether the possession is considered 'inalienable' or 'alienable' (roughly, permanent, unremovable "possessions" such as relatives, body parts are 'inalienable', while temporary, removable "possessions" such as books, clothing, cars are 'alienable'). Does your language make such a distinction? If so, note how this is made.

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#5 - Word Order

OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT: YOU MAY USE ASSIGNMENT 5 TO REPLACE A LOWER GRADE ON A PREVIOUS ASSIGNMENT. OTHERWISE, YOU MAY IGNORE IT.

For the most part, this assignment will concentrate on word order in simple sentences. It will be concerned with the order of Subject, Verb, and (Direct) Object, plus several other categories that also correlate with the order of these elements. It is understood that you are dependent on the amount of detail of the descriptions that you have available in answering these questions.

1. Simple positive declarative sentences

Give the basic (or usual, or most natural, etc.) word order for:

- a. intransitive sentences, i.e., what is the order of subject and verb?
- b. simple transitive sentences, i.e., what is the order of subject, verb, and object?
- c. ditransitive sentences, i.e., what is the order of subject, verb, direct object, and indirect object? Is the indirect object marked with a case marker? with a preposition or postposition? by word order?

Indicate how free the word order is:

- a. Is it primarily grammatically determined (as in English)? Give examples to show your point.
- b. Is it discourse determined (as in Russian)? Give examples to show your point.

2. Yes-no questions

How are yes-no questions formed? Do they have the same word order as declarative sentences? Give examples to show your point. E.g., in English, yes-no questions are formed in simple declarative sentences by placing an auxiliary verb before the subject ('Sam can dance' vs. 'Can Sam dance?'). In Japanese, yes-no questions are formed by adding a marker at the end of the sentence ('Sam can dance, right?').

3. Question word questions

How are questions word questions formed? Do they have the same word order as declarative sentences? Give examples to show your point. E.g., in English, question word questions are formed by using an interrogative pronoun (who, what, where, etc.) for the questioned element and placing it at the beginning of the sentence; if any element except the subject is questioned, an auxiliary verb appears before the subject ('Sam saw Sally' vs. 'Who did Sam see?' vs. 'Who saw Sally'). In Japanese, the interrogative pronoun stays in the place where the questioned element would be in a declarative sentence ('Sam saw who?').

4. Correlation of adpositions and verb, object order

Does your language have prepositions or postpositions? Give examples, if so.

In general, languages with the word order Verb-Object have prepositions and languages with the word order Object-Verb have postpositions. Comment on whether your language is consistent with this observation. Give examples of this.

5. Other observations

You are free to add any other observations about word order in your language that you find interesting.