

## Assignment 2: Testing universals

Due February 16 before class. Submit on IVLE > Files > Student Submission > Assignment 2.

Based on the study of 30 languages, Greenberg (1963) proposed a set of 45 *linguistic universals* of basic word order, syntax, and morphology. Although subsequent research has identified exceptions to a number of the universals, in many cases the claimed universals are overwhelmingly true, and they continue to be highly influential.

Choose one of Greenberg's universals from List A and one from List B and discuss how Nepali satisfies or counterexamples these two universals.<sup>1</sup> Some guidelines:

- Use prose to explain your thinking and examples to support your conclusions.
- All examples you use in your discussion must come from class or from your small group elicitation, not external sources on Nepali.
- Example sentences should be presented using three-line glosses: Nepali parsed by morpheme, aligned English glosses, and English translation.<sup>2</sup> Individual words can be given with their glosses in list or table form.
- Your submission should be 2–4 pages. Clarity is more important than quantity.

### List A:

3. "With overwhelmingly greater than chance frequency, languages with normal SOV order are postpositional."
7. "If in a language with dominant SOV order there is no alternative basic order, or only OSV as the alternative, then all adverbial modifiers of the verb likewise precede the verb."
16. "...In languages with dominant order SOV, an inflected auxiliary always follows the main verb."
32. "Whenever the verb agrees with a nominal subject or nominal object in gender, it also agrees in number."
38. "Where there is a case system, the only case which ever has only zero allomorphs is the one which includes among its meanings that of the subject of the intransitive verb."
42. "All languages have pronominal categories involving at least three persons and two numbers."

### List B:

20. "When any or all of the items (demonstrative, numeral, and descriptive adjective) precede the noun, they are always found in that order. If they follow, the order is either the same or its exact opposite."

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<sup>1</sup>The numbers below refer to the number in Greenberg's work.

<sup>2</sup>If there are some parts of the sentence which are not relevant for your argument and are therefore not parsed into morphemes or have approximate glosses, that's ok.

22. "If in comparisons of superiority the only order, or one of the alternative orders, is standard-marker-adjective, then the language is postpositional. With overwhelmingly more than chance frequency if the only order is adjective-marker-standard, the language is prepositional."

For example, English is an "adjective-marker-standard" order language. The "marker" is *than* and the "standard" is who John is being compared to, *you*. Japanese is a "standard-marker-adjective" language, with the "marker" *yori*.

- (1) John is smarter than you.
- (2) Jon-wa kimi-yori kashikoi.  
John-TOP you-than smart  
'John is smarter than you.'

24. "If the relative expression precedes the noun either as the only construction or as an alternate construction, either the language is postpositional, or the adjective precedes the noun or both." ("Relative expression" here means relative clause.)

28. "If both the derivation and inflection follow the root, or they both precede the root, the derivation is always between the root and the inflection."

Recall: Inflectional morphology includes agreement and case marking, and never changes the category of the stem. Derivational morphology creates new words with a different (derived) meaning, which might be of a different category.

31. "If either the subject or object noun agrees with the verb in gender, then the adjective always agrees with the noun in gender."

## References

Greenberg, Joseph. 1963. Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements. In *Universals of language*. MIT Press.