

Assignment 3: Testing universals

Due Friday, February 22. Submit on IVLE > Files > Student Submission > Assignment 3.

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 the list below and discuss how Burmese satisfies or counterexamples the universal.¹ 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 small group elicitation, not external sources on Burmese. (If data comes from the field notes of another group's small group sessions, you should credit them.)
- Example sentences should be presented using three-line glosses: Burmese parsed by morpheme, aligned English glosses, and English translation.² Individual words can be given with their glosses in list or table form.
- Remember to use both positive and negative data to support your claim(s).
- Your submission should be about two pages. Clarity is more important than quantity.

1. "In declarative sentences with nominal subject and object, the dominant order is almost always one in which the subject precedes the object."
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."
14. "In conditional statements, the conditional clause precedes the conclusion as the normal order in all languages."
15. "In expressions of volition and purpose, a subordinate verbal form always follows the main verb as the normal order except in those languages in which the nominal object always precedes the verb."

For example, the example in (1) is *compatible* with Universal 15 because the subordinate verb "buy" in the underlined purposive adjunct follows the main verb, "went":

¹The numbers below refer to the number in Greenberg's work.

²If 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.

(1) I went to the store to buy milk.

19. "When the general rule is that the descriptive adjective follows, there may be a minority of adjectives which usually precede, but when the general rule is that descriptive adjectives precede, there are no exceptions."
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."
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 *you* is being compared to, *John*. Japanese is a STANDARD - MARKER - ADJECTIVE language, with *yor*i being the MARKER.

(2) You are smarter than John.

(3) Kimi-wa Jon-yori kashikoi.
you-TOP John-than smart
'You are smarter than John.'

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.

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."

References

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