

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2016



Problem 6. Who saw the Kaqchikel dog? (15 marks)

Kaqchikel is a Mayan language spoken in the highlands of Guatemala. Here are some Kaqchikel sentences together with their English translations. The first example also has a word-for-word translation which shows that the name *Juan* has a masculine marker *a* as well as a definite article *ri*.

Unlike English, Kaqchikel has a series of indefinite pronouns which make no distinction between humans and the rest of the world: *achike* means 'who or what', *k'o* means 'something or someone' and *majun* means 'nothing or no-one'. All these indefinite pronouns must precede the verb.

lwir xutz'ët ri tz'i ri a Juan. yesterday saw the dog the masc Juan	Yesterday Juan saw the dog
Achike xutz'ët ri a Juan?	Who/what did Juan see?
Achike xtz'etö ri tz'i?	Who/what saw the dog?
K'o xutz'ët ri a Juan.	Juan saw someone/something.
Majun xtz'etö ri tz'i.	No-one/nothing saw the dog.
Achike k'o xutz'ët?	Who/what saw someone/something?
Achike k'o xtz'etö?	Who/what did someone/something see?

Question 6. In the table below, write a letter against each Kaqchikel sentence to show which of the English sentences is its translation.

___ Achike majun xutëj?	A. Someone ate something.	
___ K'o k'o xutëj.	B. What did someone eat?	
___ Achike xtxö ri wäy?	C. Who didn't eat anything?	
___ Majun xintëj.	D. No one ate tortilla.	
___ Achike k'o xtxö?	E. There's something that no one ate.	
___ K'o majun xtxö.	F. I didn't eat anything.	
___ Majun k'o xutëj.	G. No one ate anything.	
___ Majun xtxö wäy.	H. Everyone ate something.	
___ K'o majun xutëj.	I. Who ate the tortilla?	
___ Majun majun xutëj.	J. Someone didn't eat anything.	

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__G__ Majun k'o xutëj.	G. No one ate anything.	
__D__ Majun xtxö wäy.	H. Everyone ate something.	
__J__ K'o majun xutëj.	I. Who ate the tortilla?	
__H__ Majun majun xutëj.	J. Someone didn't eat anything.	

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Scoring: One point for each correct assignment (max 10).

Comment

1. Kaqchikel has a very unusual basic word order: VOS (verb – object – subject), found in the very first sentence. This order can be broken down into two facts:
 - a. The subject follows the verb.
 - b. The object separates the subject from the verb.
2. It also has two forms for the verbs ‘ate’ and ‘saw’ (and presumably for other verbs too):
 - a. a default form, found with basic VOS order (xutz’ët, xutěj, xintěj)
 - b. a special form (xtz’etö, xtjö) used when both the conditions in #1a and #1b are broken, namely when the subject is immediately before the verb, as in SVO or OSV.

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__G__ Majun k'o xutëj.	G. No one ate anything.	
__D__ Majun xtxö wäy.	H. Everyone ate something.	
__J__ K'o majun xutëj.	I. Who ate the tortilla?	
__H__ Majun majun xutëj.	J. Someone didn't eat anything.	

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3. Kaqchikel has a very unusual basic word order: VOS (verb – object – subject), found in the very first sentence. This order can be broken down into two facts:
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4. It also has two forms for the verbs 'ate' and 'saw' (and presumably for other verbs too):
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