

Conlang questions from Describing Morphosyntax

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Contents

1	Demographic and ethnographic information	3
1.1	Name of the language	3
1.2	Ethnology	3
1.3	Demography	3
1.4	Genetic affiliation	3
1.5	The sociolinguistic situation	3
1.5.1	Multilingualism and language attitudes	3
1.5.2	Contexts of use and language use	3
1.5.3	Viability	3
1.5.4	Loan words	3
1.6	Dialects	4
2	Morphological Typology	4
2.1	Historical background and definitions	4
2.2	Morphological processes	4
2.3	Head/dependent marking	4
3	Grammatical categories	4
3.1	Nouns	4
3.2	Verbs	4
3.3	Modifiers	5
3.4	Adverbs	5
4	Constituent order typology	6
4.1	Verb phrase	6
4.2	Noun phrase	6
4.3	Adpositional phrases (prepositions and postpositions)	6
4.4	Comparatives	6

1 Demographic and ethnographic information

1.1 Name of the language

1. What is the language known as to outsiders?
2. What term do the people use to distinguish themselves from other language groups?
3. What is the origin of these terms?

1.2 Ethnology

4. What is the dominant economic activity of the people?
5. Briefly describe the ecosystem, material culture, and cosmology.

1.3 Demography

6. Where is the language spoken?
7. How are the people distributed in this area?
8. Are there other language groups inhabiting the same area?
9. What is the nature of the interaction with these language groups? Economic? Social? Friendly? Belligerent?
10. In social/economic interactions with other groups, which groups are dominant and which are marginalized? How so?

1.4 Genetic affiliation

11. What language family does this language belong to?
12. What are its closest relatives?

1.5 The sociolinguistic situation

1.5.1 Multilingualism and language attitudes

13. What percentage of people are monolingual? (Treat men and women separately)
14. What language(s) are people multilingual in, and to what degree?
15. What is the attitude of the speakers of this language, as opposed to other languages they may know?

1.5.2 Contexts of use and language use

16. In what contexts are multilingual individuals likely to use the language described in this sketch? When do they use other languages?

1.5.3 Viability

17. Are children learning the language as their first language? If so, how long do they remain monolingual?
18. What pressures are there on young people to learn another language or reject their own language? How strong are these pressures?

1.5.4 Loan words

19. Does the lexicon of this language contain many words from the other languages? If so, in what semantic domains do these tend to occur?

1.6 Dialects

20. Is there significant dialect variation? What kinds of differences distinguish the dialects?
21. What dialect is represented in this sketch?

2 Morphological Typology

2.1 Historical background and definitions

22. Is the language dominantly isolating or polysynthetic?
23. If the language is at all polysynthetic, is it dominantly agglutinative or fusional?
24. Give examples of its dominant pattern and any secondary patterns.

2.2 Morphological processes

25. If the language is at all agglutinative, is it dominantly prefixing, suffixing, or neither?
26. Illustrate the major and secondary patterns (including infixation, stem modification, reduplication, suprasegmental modification, and suppletion)

2.3 Head/dependent marking

27. If the language is at all polysynthetic, is it dominantly "head-marking," "dependent-marking," or mixed?
28. Give some examples of each type of marking the language exhibits.

3 Grammatical categories

3.1 Nouns

29. What are the distributional properties of nouns?
30. What are the structural properties of nouns?
31. What are the major formally distinct subcategories of nouns?

Proper names, possessable vs non-possessable, count vs mass, noun class (If you have a noun class system, put it in the noun chapter.)

32. What is the basic structure of the noun word (for polysynthetic languages) and/or noun phrase (for more isolating languages)?
33. Does the language have free pronouns and/or anaphoric clitics?
34. Give a chart of the free pronouns and or anaphoric clitics.

3.2 Verbs

35. What are the distributional properties of verbs?
36. What are the structural properties of verbs?
37. What are the major subclasses of verbs?
38. Describe the order of various verbal operators within the verbal word or verb phrase? See the list below.
 - verb agreement/concord
 - semantic role markers (applications)

Distributional properties:

How nouns appear in phrases, clauses and texts

Structural properties:

internal structure of the noun, ie. case, number, gender

add section ref

Anaphoric clitics

are pronouns that must be attached to another word.

add section references

valence increasing devices
 valence decreasing operations
 tense/aspect/mode (TAM)
 evidentials
 location and direction
 speech act markers
 verb(-phrase) negation
 subordination/nominalization
 switch-reference

39. Give charts of the various paradigms, e.g., person marking, tense/aspect/mode etc. Indicate major allomorphic variants.
40. Are directional and/or locational notions expressed in the verb or verb phrase at all?

Questions to answer for all verbal operations (see p38):

41. Is this operation obligatory, i.e., does one member of the paradigm have to occur in every finite verb or verb phrase?
42. Is it productive, i.e., can the operation be specified for all verb stems, and does it have the same meaning with each one? (Nothing is fully productive, but some operations are more productive than others)
43. Is this operation primarily coded **morphologically, analytically, or lexically**? Are there any exceptions to the general case?
44. Where in the verb phrase or verbal word is this operation likely to appear? Can it occur in more than one place?

3.3 Modifiers

45. If you posit a morphosyntactic category of adjectives, give evidence for not grouping these forms with the verbs or nouns.
46. What characterizes a form as being an adjective in this language?
47. How can you characterize semantically the class of concepts coded by this formal category?
48. Do adjectives agree with their heads (e.g., in number, case and/or noun class)
49. What kind of system does the language employ for counting? Decimal, quinary?
50. How high can a fluent native speaker count without resorting either to words from another language or to a generic word like *many*? Exemplify the system up to this point.
51. Do numerals agree with their head nouns?

3.4 Adverbs

52. What characterizes a form as being an adverb in this language? If you posit a distinct class of adverbs, argue for why these forms should not be treated as nouns, verbs, or adjectives.
53. For each kind of adverb listed in this section, list a few members of the type, and specify whether there are any restrictions relative to that type, e.g., where they can come in a clause, any morphemes common to the type, etc.

Types of adverbs include **manner** (*quickly, slowly, patiently, etc*), **time**, **direction/location**, and **evidential/epistemic** (indicates the source of information - hearsay, first-hand, second-hand, or conjecture)

54. Are any of these classes of adverbs related to older complement-taking (matrix) verbs?

4 Constituent order typology

General questions for all units of structure

55. What is the neutral order of free elements in the unit?
56. Are there variations?
57. How do the variant orders function?

Question specific to the main clause constituent order:

58. What is the pragmatically neutral order of constituents (A/S, P, and V) in basic clauses of the language?

4.1 Verb phrase

59. Where do auxiliaries occur in relation to the semantically "main" verb?
60. Where do verb-phrase adverbs occur with respect to the verb and auxiliaries?

4.2 Noun phrase

61. Describe the order(s) of elements in the noun phrase.

4.3 Adpositional phrases (prepositions and postpositions)

62. Is the language dominantly prepositional or post-positional? Give examples.

63. Do many adpositions come from nouns or verbs?

4.4 Comparatives

64. Does the language have one or more grammaticalized comparative constructions?
65. If so, what is the order of the standard, the marker, and the quality by which an item is compared to the standard?

The 3 elements of comparison:

(1) the known standard against which the subject is compared;

(2) the marker that signals that the clause is comparative, and (3) the quality by which the subject is compared to the standard.