

Conlang questions from Describing Morphosyntax

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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?
63. Do many adpositions come from nouns or 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.

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? See 65.

4.5 Question particles and question words

66. in yes/no questions, if there is a question particle, where does it occur?
67. In information questions, where does the question word occur?

4.6 Summary

68. How does this language compare in its constituent orders to universal expectations, as represented by Greenberg (1963), Hawkins (1983) or some other well-known typology?

5 Noun and noun-phrase operations

5.1 Compounding

69. Is there noun-noun compounding (e.g., *windshield*)?
70. How do you know it is compounding?
71. Is there noun-verb (or verb-noun) compounding that results in a noun (e.g., *pickpocket*, *scarecrow*)

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.

72. Are these processes productive (like noun-verb-er in English *can-opener*)?

73. How common is compounding?

5.2 Denominalization

74. Are there any processes (productive or not) that form a verb from a noun?

75. An adjective from a noun?

76. An adverb from a noun?

5.3 Number

77. Is number expressed in the noun phrase?

78. Is the distinction between singular and non-singular obligatory, optional, or completely absent in the noun phrase?

79. If number marking is "optional," when does it tend to occur, and when does it tend not to occur?

80. If number marking is obligatory, is number overtly expressed for all noun phrases or only some subclasses of noun phrases, such as animates?

81. What non-singular distinctions are there?

5.4 Case

82. Do nouns exhibit morphological case?

83. If so, what are the cases?

5.5 Articles, determiners, and demonstratives

84. Do noun phrases have articles?

85. If so, are they obligatory or optional, and under what circumstances do they occur?

86. Are they separate words, or bound morphemes?

87. Is there a class or classes of demonstratives as distinct from articles?

88. How many degrees of distance are there in the system of demonstratives?

89. Are there other distinctions besides distance?

5.6 Possessors

90. How are possessors expressed in the noun phrase?

91. Do nouns agree with their possessors? Do possessors agree with possessed nouns? Neither, or both?

92. Is there a distinction between alienable and inalienable possession?

93. Are there other types of possession?

94. When the possessor is a full noun, where does it usually come with respect to the possessed noun?

5.7 Class (including gender)

95. Is there a noun class system?

96. What are the classes, and how are they manifested in the noun phrase?

add ref
to case
section

97. What dimension of reality is most central to the noun class system (e.g., animacy, shape, function, etc.)? What other dimensions are relevant?
98. Do the classifiers occur with numerals? Adjectives? Verbs?
99. What is their function in these contexts?

5.8 Diminution/Augmentation

100. Does the language employ diminutives and/or augmentative operators in the noun or noun phrase?

Questions to answer for all nominal operations

101. Is this operation obligatory, i.e., does one member of the paradigm have to occur in every full noun phrase?
102. Is it productive, i.e., can the operation be specified for all noun phrases and does it have the same meaning with each one? (Nothing is fully productive, but some operations are more so than others.)
103. Is this operation primarily expressed lexically, morphologically, or analytically?
104. Where in the noun phrase is this operation likely to be located? Can it occur in more than one place?

6 Predicate nominals and related constructions

Clauses that express **proper inclusion, equation, attribution, location, existence, and possession**

6.1 Predicate nominals

105. How are proper inclusion and equative predicates formed?
106. What restrictions are there, if any, on the Tense/Aspect/Mode marking of such clauses?

6.2 Predicate adjectives (attributive clauses)

Example *He is tall*

107. How are predicate adjectives formed? (Include a separate section on predicate adjectives only if they are structurally distinct from predicate nominals.)

6.3 Predicate locatives

108. How are locational clauses (or predicate locatives) formed?

6.4 Existentials

109. How are existential clauses formed? (Give examples in different tense/aspects, especially if there is significant variation.)
110. How are negative existentials formed?
111. Are there extended uses of existential morphology? (Provide pointers to other relevant sections of the grammar.)

6.5 Possessive clauses

112. How are possessive clauses formed?

Proper inclusion is when a specific entity is asserted to be among the class of items specified in the nominal predicate. For example *He is a teacher* might be paraphrased "he is a member of the class of items designated by the noun *teacher*"

Equative say that one thing is identical to another.

e.g. *He is my father.*

NOTE: MOST LANGUAGES DO NOT DISTINGUISH THE TWO

7 Grammatical relations

8 Voice and valence adjusting operations

9 Other verb and verb-phrase operations

10 Pragmatically marked structures

11 Clause combinations

12 Conclusions: the language in use

113. What are the discourse functions of the various referential devices? That is, which code highly continuous referents, and which code highly discontinuous referents?