

## Nominal Inflection

### 1. Relational inflection on nouns

We start with inflection that arises on nouns (or in noun phrases) in relation to other elements in phrase structure.

#### 1. Case

- In many languages, arguments are marked by morphemes which signal their grammatical function:

- 1) Japanese (Bobaljik 2002: Unit 6):  
 If a noun is to be used as a subject, it can be marked with the suffix *-ga*.  
 If a noun is to be used as an object, it can be marked with the suffix *-o*.  
 If a noun is to be used as an indirect object, it can be marked with the suffix *-ni*.

sensei 'teacher'

<b>Senseiga</b>	sushio	tabeta.	
teacher-subj	sushi-obj	ate	' <b>The teacher</b> ate the sushi.'

Inuga	<b>senseio</b>	kanda.	
dog-SUBJ	teacher-OBJ	bit	'The dog bit <b>the teacher</b> .'

Hanakoga	<b>senseini</b>	ringoo	ageru.
Hanako-SUBJ	teacher-IND.OBJ	apple-OBJ	is.giving
'H. is giving an apple <b>to the teacher</b> .'			

- The traditional term for the case that marks subjects in languages like Japanese (and many others) is **nominative case**, and the case that marks objects is **accusative case**.

- The following inventory of cases is very common, cross-linguistically

- 2)
 

nominative	marks subjects
accusative	marks objects
dative	marks indirect objects
genitive	marks possessors

- 3) There is little case in modern English:

I – nominative, me – accusative, my – genitive  
 he – nominative, him – accusative, his – genitive  
 they – nominative, them – accusative, their – genitive

- 4)
  - a. John gave **me** the book
  - b. **I** was given the book

- 5) a. Marie introduced **him** to her boss  
 b. **He** was introduced to her boss

### 1.1.Types of case

- When a case marker transparently indicates a noun's surface grammatical function, it is called a **structural case** marker.
- Sometimes case is assigned in connection with the semantic role a noun has. This is called **inherent case**.

- 6) Strákunum var bjargað (Icelandic)  
 boys-the-DAT-PL was rescued  
 'The boys were rescued.'

- Non-core arguments and non-arguments can also get morphological case: **oblique case**

#### 7) Korean

Chelsoo-ka i chayk-ul sey pen-ul  
 Chelsoo-Nom this book-Acc three times-Acc  
 'Chelsoo read this book three times.'

#### 8) Finnish

Liisa muisti matkan vuoden.  
 Liisa<sub>nom</sub> remembered trip<sub>acc</sub> year<sub>acc</sub>  
 'Liisa remembered the trip for a year.'

### 1.2 Nominative-accusative vs. Ergative-Absolutive systems

- Languages differ with respect to how structural cases are aligned.
- **nominative-accusative case systems**: the subject of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive verb both get the same case morphology

- 9) a. **She** read the book.  
 b. **She** danced.

S	V	O
S	V	

• **ergative-absolutive case systems:** transitive and intransitive subjects do not get the same morphological case. The subject of an intransitive verb gets the same case ending as the object of a transitive verb.

- 8) a.      arna-**up**      angut      taku-jaa      *Inuktitut*  
              woman-case   man(case)   see-3.sg/3.sg  
              'The woman sees the man.'
- b.      angut      sinik-tuq  
              man(case)   see-3.sg  
              'The man is sleeping.'
- S      V      O  
           S      V

### 1.3 Case and Prepositions

In all the examples so far, it is the verb that determines the case of a noun. Case can also be assigned by prepositions. Note that there is great variability in the range of cases that prepositions assign (similar to oblique cases). It is even possible for the same preposition to assign different cases in different contexts

#### 9) Russian

- a.      ot      Ivan-a  
              from   Ivan-GEN
- b.      k      Ivan-u  
              to      Ivan-DAT
- c.      s      Ivan-om  
              with   Ivan-INSTR
- 10) a.      vojti   v      komnat-u  
              go      to      room-ACC  
              'to go in(to) the room.'
- b.      sidet   v      komnat-e  
              sit      to      room-prepositional  
              'to sit in the room.'

## 2. Concord

• Similar to agreement (see Week 9), concord is a phenomenon in which the specifiers and modifiers in an NP share selected features of the head noun.

- 11) La              casa              roj-a  
       det.fem      house.fem      red-fem  
       'The red house.'
- 12) El              coche              roj-o  
       det.masc      car.masc      red-masc  
       'The red car.'

### 3. Non-relational inflectional categories on nouns

- The inflectional form of a noun is determined by a number of inflectional categories traditionally not thought of as being relational.:

- 13)            person (pronouns only)  
                  gender and noun class  
                  animacy  
                  number  
                  definiteness

#### 3.1 Person

- Many (though not all) languages make a three-way person distinction
 

1 <sup>st</sup> person ( <b>speaker-participant</b> )	'I'
2 <sup>nd</sup> person (addressee-participant)	'you'
3 <sup>rd</sup> person ( <b>non-participant</b> )	'he/she'
- It is also not uncommon for languages to make an exclusive/inclusive distinction for 1<sup>st</sup> persons.
 

1.exclusive ('we' meaning the speaker and some body other than the addressee)
1.inclusive ('we' meaning <i>you and me</i> )

#### (1) Cree (Moose dialect) Pronominal system

ni:la	"I"
ki:la	"you(sg)"
wi:la	"he/she"
ni:la:na:n	"we (not including you)" 1st person plural exclusive
ki:la:na:w	"we (including you)" 1st person plural inclusive
ki:la:wa:w	"you(pl)"
wi:la:wa:w	"they"

#### 3.2 Gender and noun class

- Nouns in many languages are lexically specified as belonging to distinct lexical classes.
- In Indoeuropean languages, we typically find a 2 or 3-way noun class system, traditionally referred to as **gender**, with the subcategories: masculine vs. feminine vs. neuter
- Assignment of a noun to a particular gender is arbitrary:

- 14)    Italian            *tavolo* 'table' (m.)  
        French            *la table* 'table' (f.)

- The relationship between these classes and conceptual gender is tenuous. It is not

always the case that nouns referring to females are grammatically feminine and nouns referring to males are grammatically masculine.

German	mädchen	"girl"	<i>neuter</i>
Old English	wi:fmann	"woman"	<i>masculine</i>

• In many languages, the system of genders for nouns is far more complex. These systems are referred to as **noun class** systems (because there is no tradition of using the term 'gender' and in any case the number of classes usually far exceeds 3).

- Note that there is often confusion between this 'exploded gender categories' use of the term noun class and another use) referring to **form class** or **declension class** (as in this week's discussion of Harris 1991 reading). The line between these can be hard to draw without careful study.
- Form class/declension class is traditionally understood as a purely formal classification that affects the form (i.e. choice of allomorphs) of an inflectional morpheme (similar to **conjugation class** for verbs, which we saw in Week 9).
- We'll return to form class/declension class in our discussion of Harris 1991.

• Languages with noun class systems divide nouns up into classes that are often based on various semantic features, including such things as shape, size and function. For example, Kwakw'ala distinguishes people from objects, and flat objects from round objects. However, the correlation is not always perfect. Often the original semantic basis for a distinction between two noun classes is obscured by historical factors.

Kwakw'ala (Canadian amerindian language)

a.	mal-uk <sup>m</sup>	bəg <sup>m</sup> anəm	'two men'
b.	mal-əksa	map	'two blankets'
c.	mal-əsla	hamats'i	'two plates'

15) Some Swahili noun classes

Class number	General content	Prefix	Example	Gloss
1	human, sg.	mu-	mwalimu	teacher
2	human, pl.	wa-	walimu	teachers
5	misc. sg	ji-	jino	tooth
6	misc. pl	ma-	meno	teeth
7	misc. sg	ki-	kiazi	sweet potato
8	misc.pl	vi-	viasi	sweet potatoes
10	everyday items, pl	ny-	nyembe	razors
11	everyday items, sg	u-/w-	wembe	razor

### 3.3 Animacy

- Animacy is an inflectional category that differentiates nouns on the basis of how sentient or alive the referent of the noun is. Animacy is sometimes expressed on the noun itself, but more often its expression is seen in the morphosyntactic environment of the noun, e.g (18), (19), (20).

## (18) Spanish (choice of adposition)

(Heusinger et al 2008)

- a. Vi        \*(a) la mujer.  
saw.1SG ACC the woman  
I saw the woman.
- b. Vi        (\*a) la mesa.  
saw.1SG ACC the table  
I saw the table.

## (19) Mongolian (choice of case)

(Heusinger et al 2008)

- (2) Bi nom(\*-ig) unsh-san.  
I book-ACC read-PST  
I read a book (I did bookreading).
- (3) Bi Gunne\*(-g) har-san.  
I Gunne-ACC see-PST  
I saw Gunne.

## (20) Navajo (word order)

- a. \*Tsídii        at'ééd yishtąsh  
bird            girl    yi-pecked  
\*'The bird pecked the girl.'
- b. At'ééd tsídi    bishtąsh  
girl bird    bi-pecked  
The girl was pecked by the bird.

- Some languages have a 'simple' contrast between animate (e.g. people, animals) or inanimate (e.g. buildings, trees, abstract ideas), whereas others have complex hierarchical systems.

## (21) Navajo

Human > Infant/Big Animal > Medium-sized Animal > Small Animal > Natural Force > Abstraction

- There is often a degree of arbitrariness in animacy systems (for this reason, many linguists treat animacy as a subset of noun class/gender) and different languages with animacy hierarchies rank nouns in very different ways. Some nouns which refer to inanimate things are grammatically animate. e.g in Algonquian. *a:sokan* "wharf(anim.)". Deities, spirits, or certain types of plant or animal, even food, could be ranked as highly animate depending on belief systems.

### 3.4 Number

- Number is the term for the inflectional category which expresses contrasts involving countable quantities on individuated nouns. Not all languages mark a number distinction morphologically. In some languages, number is not marked on nouns at all.

(24)

Nancowry (Nicobarese Islands)

sak    not    ʔin    tʰiʔay  
 spear pig    the    we  
 "We speared the pig" or "We speared the pigs"

- In some languages, when number is marked, it is only marked on certain types of nouns, but not on others. For example, Japanese never marks number on inanimate nouns, but it does mark number on animate nouns. So *hon* can mean either "book" or "books", but the plural of *hito* "person" is *hitotati* "people."

- The simplest (and most common) number systems mark a two-way distinction between one (**singular**) and more than one (**plural**). However, some languages mark a three-way distinction between one (singular), two (**dual**), and more than two (so in these languages, plural means "more than two").

(26)

Fijian pronouns

koya    "s/he"  
 irau    "they two"  
 iratou    "they three"  
 ira    "they (more than three)"

- In the above example, the subcategories of number are:

singular vs. dual vs. trial vs. plural (more than 3)

- Other languages with a four-way system have the subcategories:

singular vs. dual vs. paucal (=a few) vs. plural (=more than a few)

- In some languages, a different kind of number distinction is made, so that instead of distinguishing singular from plural, the distinction is between **individual** and **collective**. So for example, in Tlingit, an Indigenous language spoken on the coast of B.C and Alaska., the "plural" of *lingit* "man" is *lingitq'*, which refers to a group of men, not simply to multiple men (who need not be assembled as a group, but could in principle be randomly distributed).

(25)

Inuktitut

iglu    "a house"  
 iglu-k    "two houses"  
 iglu-t    "more than two houses"





