


Agenda Monday Week 14

- Reminders
 - > No quiz this week
- This week's topic: language history
 - > How human languages vary
 - > Universals, and where they come from
 - > The search for "Proto-World"
 - Nova film on Wednesday

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Readings and Resources

- Pinker, chapter 8 "The Tower of Babel"
- Some web sites userid=e105iu password=pinker
 - > <http://www.nytimes.com/library/national/science/020100sci-archaeo-language.html>
 - > <http://www.yourdictionary.com/> [Go there](#)
 - > http://www.sciencefriday.com/pages/1995/Sep/hour2_090895.html



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Language Universals: two very different views

There are over 6000 different languages on Earth! [However](#)

- Languages differ from each other without limit and in unpredictable ways (Joos, 1957)
- A visiting Martian would conclude that aside from mutually uninterpretable vocabulary, Earthlings speak a single language (Chomsky, 1957)

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Differences among languages

- Word structure
 - > isolating: words are immutable
 - English, Chinese
 - > inflecting: words are stems for inflections
 - Latin, Russian
 - > agglutinating: verbs are stems for markers of all major elements of a sentence
 - Kivunjo, West Greenlandic Eskimo

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Case in Russian (Slavic)

- sobak-a: dog + nominative (for subjects)
- sobak-u: dog + accusative (for direct objects, etc.)
- sobak-e: dog + dative (for indirect objects, etc.)
- sobak-i: dog + genitive (for possession, etc.)
- sobak-0j: dog + instrumental (for manner, etc.)
- sobak-e: dog + locative (for object of prepositions)

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Agglutination of Kivunjo (Bantu)

- Naikimlyiia: the verb in "I eat goats for Mary"
 - > N: focus of conversation is on this verb
 - > a: subject agreement with a Class 1 noun (16)
 - > i: present tense
 - > ki: object agreement with a Class 7 noun
 - > m: benefactive agreement with a Class 1 noun
 - > lyi: verb: eat
 - > i: marker indicating a extra role player (ben.)
 - > a: indicative (vs. subjunctive) mood

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Differences continued

■ Word order

- > fixed order: roughly correlates with isolating languages
 - English, Chinese
- > Free order: roughly correlates to inflectional and agglutinating
 - Latin, Russian, Warlpiri

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Word order in Russian (Slavic)

- Irin-a vidit sobak-u: "Irina sees dog"
- Irin-a sobak-u vidit: "Irina sees dog"
- Sobak-u Irin-a vidit: "Irina sees dog"
- Sobak-u vidit Irin-a : "Irina sees dog"
- Vidit Irin-a sobak-u: "Irina sees dog"
- Vidit sobak-u Irin-a : "Irina sees dog"

How do you say "The dog sees Irina"?

Sobak-a vidit Irin-u: "Dog sees Irina"

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Differences continued

■ Subject and Object Case systems

- > Nominative-Accusative
 - The case of the subject of both transitive and intransitive verbs is opposed to that of the object
 - English, Russian, Japanese
- > Ergative-Absolutive
 - The case of the subject of transitive verbs only is opposed to that of both objects and the subject of intransitive verbs
 - Basque, Warlpiri

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Differences continued

■ (Surface) Basic Word Order

- > SVO (common)
 - English, Russian, many others
- > SOV (common)
 - Japanese, German (embedded clauses), Turkish, etc.
- > VSO (less common)
 - Welsh (Gaelic), Classical Arabic
- > VOS (rare); OVS (even rarer)
 - Malagasy; Hixkaryana (Amazon basin only?)
- > OSV (probably nonexistent)

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Differences continued

■ Prominence

- > Subject prominent
 - English:
 - She saw the dog.
- > Topic prominent
 - German, Russian, Japanese, ASL
 - Den Hund hat sie gesehen.
 - Sobaku videla ona.

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The search for universals

■ Greenberg (1963) found 45 in 30 languages studied.

- > absolute: no language makes questions by reversing all words
- > statistical: subject usually precedes object
- > implicational:
 - If SOV, then very probably postpositional
 - She dog sees → house in; city from
 - If VSO, then necessarily prepositional
 - Sees she dog → in house; from city

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What Caused Universals?

- Descendents from one (Mother) language
- Human intellect forces languages to conform to the same patterns
- The human language processor creates all languages, thus all conform to the requirements imposed by it.

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“Mother” language would exert too little influence to preserve universals

- Radical breaks have occurred: Creoles
- Implications cannot be transmitted, only comparative linguists know they exist
- Correlations break down with time, and are eventually (completely?) erased
- Languages change within themselves: English went from inflected, (basic) SOV order, topic prominent to what it is today.

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Memory and thought could not impose universals

- Disassociation of language (English) and thought (mentalese)
- Arbitrary language rules defy logic:
 - > inversion always structure dependent
 - Could he _ have left? not *Have he could _ left?
 - Is the boy who is sick _ here? not *Is the boy who _ sick is here?
 - > Stem + derivation + inflection universally
 - “Darwinisms not *Darwinsism

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Genetically constructed human language processor

- No need to study details, the general design features of language are enough
- A Martian would see both body architecture (within a phylum) and languages as being highly similar
- Common body architecture: backbone, four articulated limbs, head, skull, tail are universal in that animal bodies vary within limit

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Agenda Wednesday Week 14

- Language change and diversity
 - > Kinds of language change
 - > Reanalysis
 - > A little history of English
 - > Language classification
- Film
 - > NOVA: *IN SEARCH OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE*
 - the history and origin of languages

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Language change = Variation

- Word change
 - > New words coined for new objects
 - > Words borrowed from other languages
 - > Changes in word meaning
- Morphological change
 - > Irregular plurals
 - fot ~ foti → fot ~ fiti (“feeti”) by umlaut rule
 - Later, plural suffix drops to leave *foot* and *feet*
 - > Tense from auxiliary
 - He hammer did → He hammered
- Syntax change
 - > English: word order, inflection, case

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Reanalysis

- Grammar is in the mind! Hence, when a child acquires a language, s/he recreates its grammar.
- Change proceeds through reanalysis
 - > account A competes with account B
 - > A strengthens as B weakens
 - > eventually, B disappears