Student Resource

Writing for Linguistics: Grammatical Analysis

Writing about grammar is different from writing about phonemic analysis, because grammar is endlessly varied, unlike phonemic analysis where the data will fall into one of three patterns (phonemes, allophones in free variation, or allophones in complementary distribution). As a result, writing about grammar is correspondingly varied. However, there are basic principles you can apply which can guide your analytical process and your writing.

Given the variety of grammatical structures in the world's languages, it helps to discuss the structures you find in relation to what is generally known about those structures. (Use the book as a resource for this.) For example, if a data set is on adjectives, then address how the adjectives in the data exemplify properties typical of adjectives in the world's languages and how they are different. If a data set is on relative clauses (these are discussed in Chapter 6), you can organize your writing to discuss how the relative clauses in the data set exemplify the properties that relative clauses are known to typically possess.

As with any linguistic analysis, the goals for writing about grammar are as follows:

- Clearly state your objectives
- Present the data in a logical sequence that guides the reader through it (write as if the reader has never seen the data before)
- Ensure your analysis is overtly stated and provide evidence that justifies it

Accuracy with regards to the data is critical, as is ***consistency*** (don't contradict yourself), and ***comprehensiveness*** (don't leave out any examples, words, morphological detail, etc.).

Always be sure that your analysis includes the following components:

- The name of the language that you are analyzing
- The goal of the problem: what you have been asked to do
- A general description of the data
- A list of words and morphemes with glosses, with words grouped by class
- A discussion of any allomorphy and how you analyzed it

After Chapter 6, your discussion is also likely to includes some of the following:

How Languages Work: An Introduction to Language and Linguistics, Revised Ed.

- A discussion of syntactic constituents, such as noun phrase or prepositional phrase
- A statement of the ordering of elements, such as major syntactic constituents (SVO, SOV, etc.), or the order of elements within a noun phrase
- An analysis of particular clause types
- Where helpful, square brackets or syntactic trees that illustrate your structural analysis
- A comparison of different constructions (e.g. statements versus questions)

If you can tie your analysis into larger themes in linguistics, i.e., address *why* the structure is as it is (for example, because of how the structure developed, or because there is a clear connection between the form of a structure and how it is used), then you have taken your analysis to the next level and are thinking *theoretically*. However, with beginning linguistics problems there often isn't enough data or depth to do this.

Here is a write-up of the Galo data in the **Procedures for Grammatical Analysis of Unfamiliar Languages** resource. Because it is a limited problem, it doesn't provide all of the pieces discussed above, but it should give you an idea of how you might present your analysis and provide evidence.

- *Name of the language and goal of the problem*

This problem presents data from Galo, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Northeast India. We are asked to determine the meaning of each word, break words into morphemes where possible, and discuss the relative ordering of the subject, object, and verb.

- *General description of the data*

The data consist of five sentences with overlapping vocabulary. Each sentence consists of a subject, an object, and a verb. Comparing the vocabulary across the sentences allows us to identify the following words and morphemes:

- *List of words and morphemes, organized by word class*

Nouns

hooziɨ̂	'chameleon'
biskutə́	'biscuit'
issə	'water'

Pronouns

ŋó	1SG
bɨ̂ and *bɨə-*	3SG (two allomorphs)

Verbs

cendù	'knows'
cɨrdù	'boiling'
piikâpká	'sprayed'
zɨ̀gâəkaakú	'fattened'

Affix

-m	ACCUSATIVE

- *Evidence for morphological analysis*

Evidence for the accusative case-marker can be found when we compare the free translations of the first-person singular pronoun in examples (a) through (c); they translate either as 'I' or 'me'. When we compare the

- *Statement of allomorphy*

Galo forms, we see that all three sentences have a word of the shape *ŋó* 'I' or *ŋóm* 'me.' Morphological analysis allows us to identify a morpheme boundary in *ŋó-m,* consisting of a first-person singular pronoun *ŋó* plus a suffix, which appears when the pronoun is an object. We find the same pattern when we compare the third-person forms in examples (d) and (e). However, here we find two allomorphs of the third-person singular pronoun: *bɨ̂* occurs in the nominative form and *bɨə-* occurs in the accusative. At this point there is insufficient data to allow for a phonological analysis of this pattern.

- *Ensuring all points of the problem are addressed; clear statement of structural facts; evidence*

With regards to constituent ordering, we find that the verb comes at the end of the clause in all five examples. The ordering of the subject and object before the verb varies. We can see this most explicitly by comparing examples (d) and (e). In each case the first-person pronoun precedes the third-person pronoun, although in (d) the first-person pronoun is nominative and in (e) it is accusative.