Typology I: Solution to Homework for Lecture 8

(The questions marked with (*) are research questions you can use to deepen your understanding, the others could be exam questions.)

1. **In a language with a dual category, is the dual always used when talking about sets of size 2? *If not, give a counterexample.**

   Not always. There are languages where dual marking is only used for subsets of countable entities. Examples are:

   - Modern Hebrew: the Dual marking (Suffix '-ajim') is only applicable to expressions of *time* (e.g. two days, two months...), *number* (two hundred, two thousand...) and so-called *natural pairs* (legs, ears, eyes, shoes...).
   - Middle Welsh: a Dual prefix is only used for nouns denoting pairs of body parts that incorporate the numeral two: glin (knee) - deulin ([two] knees), glust (ear) - dwyglust ([two] ears)

2. **Explain the difference between alienable and inalienable possession.**

   Many languages have different possession marking for *alienable* and *inalienable* entities. The inalienable type often marks an *inherent* or *permanent* possessive relationship type, whereas the alienable type marks in principle a *temporary* relationship. In many languages the inalienable type is generally used for kinship terms (mother, brother...) and body parts, whereas in other languages this type goes beyond that; e.g. in Kiribati (Austronesian), the inalienable possession type is used for the word 'auti' (house).

3. **Explain the difference between semantic and formal gender assignment. For English and German, discuss whether each languages uses semantic or formal assignment, or both. For each language, give examples of each assignment type that the language uses.**

   Semantic assignment: the gender assignment of nouns is solely determined by their meaning or attributes, like biological sex, humanness, animacy.

   Formal assignment: the semantic division (as given for semantic assignment) is only partially valid, and many nouns may belong to a gender category that contrasts with their meaning. In this case, the gender assignment can also be influenced by the morphology or phonology of the noun, or in some cases appear arbitrary.

   German has both, *semantic and formal assignment*. A classical example of semantic assignment is the suffix *-in*, which corresponds in function to the English suffix *-ess*, though it is much more productive: *Student - Studentin, Kanzler - Kanzlerin, König - Königin...*

   The presence of formal assignment becomes apparent in the following examples:

   - 'die Männlichkeit' (manhood): female gender because of suffix '-keit'

- 'das Mädchen' (girl): neutral gender because of suffix '-chen'

English has a much less pervasive gender system, primarily only a few traces based on natural gender, thus *only semantic assignment*, like the '-ess'-suffix in actor - actress, steward - stewardess, baron - baroness...

4. **Do all languages have semantic roles? Do all languages have case? Is it possible to mark semantic roles without case marking? If yes, give an example from a language you know well.**

A semantic role is a language-independent category describing a type of relationship between an event and one of its participant. All semantic roles can be expressed in some way in every language. One way to mark semantic roles is case, but not all languages have case marking, and even in languages with elaborate case systems, some semantic roles will be expressed by other means. The most common way of marking semantic roles without case marking is to use adpositions (prepositions and postpositions).

For example, modern English generally doesn't have case marking and marks semantic roles mostly by prepositions:

- *Comitative* role: I went *with* my mother to the Park.
- *Locative role*: The car stopped *at* the house.
- *Agent role* in passive sentences: The gate was observed *by* a police man.

5. **Here are eight example sentences from Icelandic. Determine whether (and how) this language marks definiteness, and whether the language uses case marking. How many noun classes (declension patterns, here equivalent to genders) can you infer for Icelandic? Justify your answer.**

- Húsið brennur. "The house is on fire."
- Konan sefur. "The woman is sleeping."
- Kona sér krakkann. "A woman sees the child."
- Krakkinn sér konu. "The child sees a woman."
- Krakki sér konuna. "A child sees the woman."
- Krakkinn sér húsið. "The child sees the house."
- Konan sér hús. "The woman sees a house."
- Krakkarnir eru í húsinu. "The children are in the house."

Comparing the sentences with the same Verb *sér* "sees", there are obviously different forms in subject position which exactly mirror the article used in English. From sentences 3 to 7, we can conclude that *krakkinn* corresponds to "the child" and *krakki* to "a child". The same contrast appears to be behind *konan* "the woman" vs. *kona* "a woman". This implies that **definiteness is expressed by nominal suffixes**.

Turning to the question of case marking, "the child" occurs as *krakkinn* in

subject position, and as *krakkann* in object position, which can only be explained by case marking. Given our typological knowledge about Indo-European languages, and the additional evidence that the form for "the woman" is identical in the intransitive sentence 2 and the transitive sentence 7, we can safely call these two cases **nominative and accusative**. The definite nominative of "woman" appears to be *konan*, the definite accusative *konuna*, and the indefinite equivalents are *kona* and *konu*. The otherwise unseen definite form *húsinu* i n the last sentence tells us that there is **at least one additional oblique case**, apparently governed by the preposition *í*.

Turning to the question of noun classes, the three nouns *kona*, *krakki*, and *hús* clearly use different suffixes for forming the accusative. *kona* undergoes a shift from *-a* to *-u*, *krakki* from *-i* to *-a*, but the two cases seem to be identical for *hús* (Sentences 1 and 6). This could be explained by a **three-gender system**, which is also plausible because in gender systems, males and females will often have different genders. The gender of *hús* is best called the neuter gender, because it shows the Indo-European property of subtractive asymmetry in neuter accusative marking, and because *hús*, being an inanimate, is a natural candidate for a neuter gender. The fact that the German cognate *Haus* is neuter further substantiates this assumption. By and large, Icelandic seems to fully preserve the ancient Indo-European three-gender system.