**LANGUAGE STRUCTURE**

1. Are we programmed for LANGUAGE STRUCTURE /born with language-structure biases (Noam Chomsky)?

**2.** What does STRUCTURE imply?

**3.** In what way does invention of words move communication to a new level? Why can’t sounds do?

**4.** How do we practice the “duality of patterning“?

**5.** What is meant by adding the syntax level to communication? Wouldn’t words do?

**6.** In what way is recursive syntax powerful (“stringing” and “nesting”)?

7. What made N. Chomsky search for “universal grammar”?

**8.** Would you argue that,

a. language is made up similarly in all of us, constrained by the same-for-all human brain and predisposed genetically in certain ways, or,

b. as nativists claim, the „sameness“ is due to universal genetic programming and hard-wired biases responsible for the acquisition of identical language structures?

9. Can we list universal features evident in languages? Can we list similarities?

**10.** What is the innate cognitive predisposition to learn language all about?

11. Do we, then, need cultural transmission? What does it contribute to language learning?

12. What’s understood by babies’ “robust learning” of language? What’s their resource?

**13**. Common patterns evident in languages may be due to speakers’ effort to solve the same sort of “communicative problems” (D. Everett’s *bows and arrows* analogy)? What do you understand by communicative problems?

# **SOME ANSWERS:**

**MIND MATURATION and the structure of language**

Cognitive constraints on learning

Words are an ingenious invention because…

**Words and thoughts:** CONCEPTS > PATTERNS > RECURSION

Are we preprogrammed for GRAMMAR? Or, do similarities in grammars stem from “comparable communicative problems” all across languages and cultures?

Language offers a UNIVERSAL solution to these communicative problems

# **Web Activity 2.2 Finding structure in language**

### Example 1 Where can and appear in English?

The conjunction and is used to join words or phrases in English, but it can not appear just anywhere. Can you describe the places where it can be used as a connector? How do you think English-learning children would figure out the correct patterns?

**Example 2** Can **prepositional phrases** appear at the beginning of a sentence in English?

Consider the examples below. Why are prepositional phrases allowed at the beginning of a sentence some of the time, but not always? Can you articulate a generalization?

*Siobhan has her singing lessons on Tuesday*. Cf. *On Tuesdays, S. has her singing lessons.*

vs. *Siobhan heard a lecture on Proust*. Cf. \**On Proust, Siobhan heard a lecture.*

### Example 3 Verbs in Semitic languages

It’s common for verbs to change their shape and convey information about whether the action took place in the past or present, or about who is initiating the action. (For example, in English: I play, he plays, we played.)

But the verbs of Semitic languages spoken in the Middle East change their shape in quite unusual ways. Consider the examples from Egyptian Arabic below: **Can you get a handle on the pattern that drives the changes in verbs**?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Katab | “he wrote” | Daras | “he studied” |
| Baktib | “I write” | Badris | “I study” |
| Iktib | “Write!” | Idris | “Study!” |
| Kaatib | “writer” | Daaris | “studier” |
| maktuub | “written” | madruus | “studied” |

**To say “he copied”, you would say na’al (symbol ’ denotes a glottal stop). How would you pronounce “I copy,” “copier,” or “copied”?**