

Ten Things that the Languages of the Pacific Northwest Have Shown Us

1. Configurationality

Languages that may satisfy the predictions of a Pronominal-Argument (PA) or Non-Configurational (NC) analysis may upon closer investigation reveal evidence of a configurational structure.

In general, one should be particularly skeptical of PA and NC analyses. Often, they are based either on (i) purely ‘negative’ evidence, or (ii) rather indirect evidence (*e.g.* absence of quantificational DPs).

Other Languages that Appear PA or NC, but Have Been Argued to be Configurational:

- Warlpiri (Legate 2002)
- Passamaquoddy (Bruening 2001)
- Navajo (Speas 1990)
- Slave (Rice 1990)
- Tlingit (Cable 2008)
- Hungarian (Kiss 2002)
- Bulgarian (Richards 2001)
- Basque (Arregi 2002)

2. Lexical Categories

There are languages where any root can function as a predicate. For some of these languages, closer investigation reveals that roots are nevertheless *still* separated into ‘nominal’ and ‘verbal’ lexical classes.

Consequence: Given how subtle the evidence for lexical categories is in these languages, it seems learners must be biased towards looking for evidence of such categories.

Outstanding Question: If languages like Lillooet and Nuu-chah-nulth *do* distinguish a class of ‘verbs’ and ‘nouns’ amongst their roots, *what accounts for the ability for all roots to head a clause?*

3. Presuppositions

Some languages may not encode presuppositions in the way that English does. In these languages, either:

- (a) Presuppositions are simply not linguistically encoded.
- (b) ‘Presuppositions’ have a different ‘character’, and do not actually concern the beliefs of the listener.

4. Quantification

In some languages, though there are adnominal quantifiers, there are no quantificational *determiners*. In some languages, there may actually be no adnominal quantifiers what-so-ever!

5. Principle C

Some languages differ from English in more freely allowing NPs to serve as the antecedent of pronouns that c-command them.

In some of these languages, such c-commanded NPs can actually seem to *bind* the c-commanding pronouns from their lower, c-commanded position!

6. Tense

In languages that have no overt tense morphology, it is still the case that there are constraints on the possible ‘topic-time’ that the sentence can have. This may indicate the existence of phonologically empty tense structure.

7. Modals

In some languages, modals have the following semantic characteristic, which is something of the ‘inverse’ of what is found for modals in English:

*The modal **base** (denotic / epistemic / circumstantial) of the modal is fixed in the lexicon, while the modal **force** (weak / strong) is determined by context.*

8. Evidentials

In languages where modals have the semantic characteristics above, it may be that so-called ‘evidential morphology’ is simply a sub-class of epistemic modal.

More generally, so-called ‘evidentials’ can vary greatly in their semantics across languages, sometimes being illocutionary operators and sometimes being more akin to epistemic modals.

9. Focus and Intonation

In some languages, focus may not be ‘phonologically marked’ via alignment with main sentence stress. Rather, focus may in some languages be ‘phonologically marked’ via alignment with the edge of particular prosodic phrases.

10. Polysynthesis / Incorporation

In some languages, polysynthesis/incorporation reflects neither a ‘lexical process’ of word-formation nor a ‘syntactic process’ of complex-head-formation (via head-movement).

Rather, in these languages, polysynthesis/incorporation may reflect a purely post-syntactic, PF process of ‘morphological merger’, akin to ‘tense-lowering’ or ‘affix-hopping’ in English.