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Grammar without tears – words

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Language can teach us grammar



Documentation can teach us
grammar

... and teach us without tears

... or at least less tears than
“the big ball of linguistic theory”

Grammar is important because . . .

Words have grammar inside them:

pukín'aapunmutihara

= 'We don't know' in the Karuk language.

pukín'aapunmutihara

We don't know.

pu-kín-'aapunmu-tih-ara

= 1 sentence

= 1 word

= 5 morphemes

We do-n't know.

= 1 sentence

= 3 words

= 4 morphemes

pu-kín-'aapunmu-tih-ara
n't-We-know-?-n't

How to learn the **grammar** of **words** from **documentation**?

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Step 1: Find 3-5 sentences with related words

wa xajáma.

wa xajámhi.

we xajámhiba

bek xajámhiba.

bek xajámhi.

Step 2: Write down each sentence like this:

a. Sentence

b.

c.

d. Translation

a. wa xajáma.

b.

c.

d. We are swimming.

- a. wa xajámhi
- b.
- c.
- d. We were swimming.

- a. wa xajámhiba.
- b.
- c.
- d. We're all thru swimming.

- a. bek xajámhiba
- b.
- c.
- d. They're thru swimming.

- a. bek xajámhi
- b.
- c.
- d. They were swimming.

Step 3: Look for what is the same in the sentences:

- ▶ **xajám** is in all the sentences

ask what is the same in the translations of those sentences:

- ▶ **swimming** is in the translation of all those sentences

→ **xajám** is a **morpheme** that means **swimming**

Step 4: Write morpheme on second line below where it is on the first line.

If morpheme is part of a word, add a dash to separate the morpheme from the rest of the word.

- a. wa xajáma.
- b. xajám-
- c.
- d. We are swimming.

Do this for all the sentences that have this morpheme.

Step 5: Write the meaning of the morpheme below it on the third line, including any dashes:

- a. wa xajáma.
- b. xajám-
- c. swimming-
- d. We are swimming.

Do this for all the sentences that have this morpheme.

Step 6: Repeat steps 3-5 until you have found all the morphemes in the sentence.

Step 3: Look for what is the same in the sentences:

- ▶ **wa** is in the first three sentences.

ask what is the same in the translations of just those sentences:

- ▶ **we** is in the translation of just those three sentences

→ **wa** is a **morpheme** that means **we**

Step 4:

- a. wa xajáma.
- b. wa xajám-
- c. swimming-
- d. We are swimming.

Step 5:

- a. wa xajáma.
- b. wa xajám-
- c. we swimming-
- d. We are swimming.

Step 3: Look for what is the same in the sentences:

- ▶ a is in the first sentence - and nowhere else!

ask what is different about the translation of that sentence:

- ▶ it has are where the others have were and thru.

→ a is a **morpheme** that means that something is **happening now** (= **present** tense).

Step 5:

- a. wa xajáma.
- b. wa xajám-a
- c. we swimming-present
- d. We are swimming.

Step 7: List morphemes (form, meaning and dashes):

xajám- swimming

wa we

-a present tense

Step 8: Organize morphemes by type:

Verb roots

xajám- swimming

...

Pronouns

wa we

...

Tense markers

-a present tense

...

Step 9: Find some more sentences and repeat steps 2–8!

Challenges

- ▶ some morphemes are not part of the English translation of sentence:

pu-kín-'aapunmu-tih-ara
n't-We-know-?-n't

need to look at other sentences to find out what
-tih means!

- ▶ some morphemes change a little bit from word to word!

kat-[s]
dog-[z]

- ▶ fun-ology!

- ▶ some morphemes change completely from word to word!

pu-kín-'aapunmu-tih-ara

'We didn't know.'

nú-'aapunmu-tih

'We know.'

kín- 'we' in a negative sentence

nú- 'we' in a positive sentence

Tak til

Kathleen and Tracey Treppa

Justin, Leanne and Pat

Daryl, Gabriela and Leanne

Jer allesammen = all of you!