

Expanding Your Language Learning: Grammar for Advanced Apprentices

First Peoples' Cultural Council

Purpose of this document

This document is a resource for apprentices in First Peoples' Cultural Council's Mentor-Apprentice Program. For more information on this program, see:

<http://www.fpcc.ca/language/Programs/Master-Apprentice.aspx>

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Goal

This resource is intended for apprentices who have completed at least 300 hours of immersion in the Mentor-Apprentice Program. Although you are all at different stages of your learning, **all** of you are much more advanced than when you started. The goal of this resource is to outline some of the common grammatical properties of your languages. Some you will know some of these things already, but if you don't, this will provide a checklist for you to keep expanding your knowledge with more complex language.

Outcomes

We hope that you will:

- Learn something new about your language
- Push yourself to continually try something new during your mentor-apprentice time
- Begin to read and study your language more **outside of** your mentor-apprentice time (*ask us* for help with finding resources)
- Connect with another apprentice to exchange ideas, especially an apprentice who speaks a language that is related to yours

We **DO NOT** expect you:

- To ask mentors to start teaching grammar to you, like in a language class
- To memorize grammatical terminology
- To distract your focus from **speaking** and **understanding**



1. Sounds

Your languages have sounds that are unfamiliar to people who grew up speaking English. Hopefully these sounds are getting easier. Some ideas to help improve:

- If you need help with certain sounds, talk to us. We might be able to provide some tips or tricks. The Enunciate website at UBC has videos to help you practice sounds of all the world's languages:
<https://enunciate.arts.ubc.ca/linguistics/world-sounds/>
- Record your mentor pronouncing words with difficult sounds, and then on your own, record yourself as you practice them. You will be able to compare the recordings and work on improving.
- Free recording software for your computer: Audacity <http://web.audacityteam.org/>

2. Word classes and some linguistic terminology

a. Types of words

Every language is made up of certain types of words. The main word classes are:

NOUNS: These words are people, places, things and ideas.

Example: *woman, Vancouver, chair, love*

VERBS: These are the action words of the sentence. The action might be physical or mental. Example: *run, jump, cook, eat, think, love*

ADJECTIVES and ADVERBS: These are describing words.

Adjectives describe nouns. Example: *bright, hot, cold, skinny, tall, red, blue*

Adverbs describe verbs. Example: *quickly, slowly, carefully, never, always*

PREPOSITIONS and POSTPOSITIONS: These words usually describe a location or time and they go together with a noun. (They might also be part of the verb.) **Pre-**positions come before or precede the noun and **post-**positions come after the noun
Example: *in, under, on top of, up, down, with, for, to, during*

These are the main word classes but languages often have other little words such as **DETERMINERS**, such as *the, a, an, this, that, these, those*, and numbers like *one, two, three*. (Note: there are other names for these types of words that you might be more familiar with, such as articles, demonstratives or particles.)



b. How are words put together?

Words are not the smallest part of language! Words can be made up of smaller meaningful parts. These little word parts are called **morphemes**. The morpheme that gives the main meaning of the word is called a **root**. Morphemes that attach to words are called **affixes**. Morphemes that are attached before the root are called **prefixes** and morphemes that are attached after the root are called **suffixes**. Sometimes, morphemes go right inside a root and these are called **infixes**. Words might not have any affixes or they might have several of them. Linguistic grammars usually use hyphens to show the morphemes inside of words.

Examples:

prefix-	root	-suffix
	<i>kind</i>	
	<i>kind</i>	<i>-ness</i>
<i>un-</i>	<i>kind</i>	
<i>un-</i>	<i>kind</i>	<i>-ly</i>
	<i>work</i>	<i>-er -s</i>
<i>re-</i>	<i>organize</i>	<i>-ation</i>

It can be helpful to understand how your language puts words together. For example, Wakashan languages mostly use **suffixes**, whereas Na-Dene languages tend to use **prefixes**, and many languages tend to use both prefixes and suffixes. Sometimes words can get very long with many morphemes. If you can recognize what those morphemes are and what they mean, it can help you to build new words.

3. Expressing time: tense

Languages have different ways of explaining **when** something happened. This is called **tense**. There are three tenses:

Present tense: the action is happening now.

I dance.

Past tense: the action already happened.

I danced (yesterday).

Future tense: the action will happen in the future.

I will dance (tomorrow).

Some languages even have several different ways of expressing past tense and future tense. For example, if something happened yesterday, you might say it a different way than if you were talking about something that happened long, long ago.

Tense is very important in language and this is something that you all should work on mastering.



ACTIVITY:

Make a list of **ALL** the verbs (action words) that you know how to say. Then ask yourself whether you know how to say each verb in the past and in the future. For example, if you know how to say “I am dancing” (or pick a verb you know), do you know the following?

Do you know how to say “I danced (yesterday)”? _____

Do you know how to say “I will dance (tomorrow)”? _____

Survival Phrases. Do you know how to ask your mentor about past and future tense? For example:

“How would I say I did that yesterday?” _____

“How would I say I’ll do that tomorrow?” _____

4. Expressing time: aspect

Tense is not the only way to talk about when an action happened. Besides past, present and future, we can talk about doing things **often** or **occasionally** or **again and again**. These specific ways of talking about when an action happened are all types of **aspect**. The way English expresses aspect is with separate words like adverbs. However, your languages may change the verb in some way to express aspect rather than using extra words like adverbs.

ACTIVITY:

If you are comfortable with using different tenses, you are ready to tackle aspect! You probably know some examples already.

Make a list of some verbs (action words) that you know well. Then ask yourself whether you know how to say each verb in any of the following ways. **Do not worry about memorizing or learning the linguistic terms** for each kind of aspect; what’s important is understanding the meaning and knowing how to say it. We include the terms just so that if you do read a grammar book about your language, you can make the connection if they use the same or similar terms. Finally, your language might not express every one of these aspects exactly like the examples below, and that’s ok too. The main goal is to expand your vocabulary by learning the many kinds of variations that a verb might have.

Here are some examples with “dance”, but try this with lots of different verbs.



Imperfective: an action that hasn't finished yet.

'I am dancing' _____

Perfective: an action that is over.

'I have danced' _____

Momentaneous: an action that began and finished in an instant.

'I danced briefly/just for a second' _____

Continuative: an action that continues.

'I kept on dancing' _____

Durative: an action that is still going on.

'I'm still dancing' _____

Habitual: an action that is done on a regular basis like a habit.

'I usually dance' _____

Completive: emphasizes the end of the action.

'I finished dancing' _____

Inceptive: emphasizes the beginning of the action.

'I started dancing' _____

Iterative: an action that is repeated.

'I dance again and again (often)' _____

Semelfactive: an action that happened only once.

'I danced once' _____

Graduative: an action that happens gradually.

'I gradually danced' _____

This is not a complete list of the kinds of aspects that there might be in your language! These are the most common ones. In addition, some grammars might use different terms for some of these things. If you have questions about terms used in a grammar about your language, just ask.

5. Expressing possibility or necessity: mood, mode or modality

We can talk about actions that have happened already or are happening now or even in the future but we also talk about actions that **might** or **might not** happen and other similar situations. In grammar books, this is usually called either **mood, mode or modality**. English tends to use separate words to convey these ideas, usually by using “auxiliary” or “helper” verbs. Your languages may change the verb again rather than using extra words – efficient as always! Here are some examples. See if you know how to express these ideas in your language.

Possibility/Conditional: an action that might happen.

‘I might dance’ _____

‘I could dance’ _____

Obligation: an action that should happen or is required to happen.

‘I should dance’ _____

‘I need to dance’ _____

‘I must dance’ _____

Desiderative: an action that you want to happen.

‘I want to dance’ _____

Optative: an action that you hope or wish will happen.

‘I hope to dance’ _____



6. Nouns and verbs and their jobs in sentences

While verbs describe the main action of the sentence, nouns can do a couple different things: they can be a **subject** or an **object**. Example:

Jane	fed	the dog.
She	fed	him.
subject	verb	object

The dog	bit	Jane.
He	bit	her.
subject	verb	object

Subjects are the nouns that are doing the action in the sentence.

Objects are the nouns that are undergoing or receiving the action in the sentence.

This is important to know because verbs may change depending on whether the noun that goes with the verb is the subject or object.

7. Person and number: subjects

Verbs are the most important words in your languages so we are going to focus on **verb morphology**, the parts that make up verbs. When you talk about an action, there can be one person doing it (**singular number**) or there can be many people doing it (**plural number**). Person refers to the people involved in a conversation:

1st person is the person talking

2nd person is the person or people you are talking to

3rd person is the person or people you are talking about

Here are some examples showing the subject **pronouns** of English.

	Singular Number	Plural Number
1 st person	I am dancing	We are dancing
2 nd person	You are dancing	You (guys) are dancing
3 rd person	She/he/it is dancing	They are dancing

Your language might even have more specific ways of saying “we”.

If you mean to include the listener, this is called **inclusive**.

If you mean to exclude the listener, this is called **exclusive**.

Example: Pretend I'm talking to Robin.

Hey Robin, we (inclusive, meaning Robin and I) sure danced last night, didn't we!

Hey Robin, we (exclusive, meaning me and John) sure danced last night!



English has only one “we” for both circumstances, but your language might have two ways.

Some languages also have a **dual person** which means two people. For example:
We (dual, meaning me and one other person) danced last night.
We (plural, meaning me and two or more other people) danced last night!

Some languages also have dual and plural in the 2nd person (*you two guys* vs. *you (3+) guys*).

For every verb that you know, do you know how to say it all six (or more) different ways?

ACTIVITY: Survival Phrases

Learn how to ask your mentor about different people doing the action.

How would I say “you're doing it”? _____

How would I say “she's doing it”? _____

How would I say “we're doing it”? _____

(If you have inclusive/exclusive or dual forms in your language, ask for those too.)

How would I say “you guys are doing it”? _____

How would I say “they're doing it”? _____

If you can, summarize the parts of words (morphemes) that change for each person/number.

Subjects

	Singular	Plural
1 st person		
2 nd person		
3 rd person		



8. Person and number: objects

Your language might have different forms when the person you are talking about is the object. Here are some examples from English.

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	She helped me	She helped us
2 nd person	She helped you	She helped you guys
3 rd person	She helped him/her/it	She helped them

For verb that have objects, do you know how to say it all six different ways?

ACTIVITY: Survival Phrases

Learn how to ask your mentor how to say things are happening to different people.

How would I say the action is happening to “me”? _____

How would I say the action is happening to “you”? _____

How would I say the action is happening to “him or her”?

How would I say the action is happening to “us”? _____

How would I say the action is happening to “you guys”?

How would I say the action is happening to “them”? _____

If you can, write the parts of words (morphemes) that change for each person/number.

Objects

	Singular	Plural
1 st person		
2 nd person		
3 rd person		



9. Person and number: possession or ownership

Your language should have different forms when a person owns something. Here are some examples from English. The morpheme marking ownership might be part of the noun or it might be a separate word.

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	my hat	our hat
2 nd person	your hat	your guys' hat
3 rd person	her/his/its hat	their hat

Sometimes, the way to mark possession might be a little different depending on what you own. For example, when you are talking about people or body parts (*my sister, my arm*) you might say it differently than when you are talking about a hat or a book.

ACTIVITY: How would I say “_____” in our language?

(This is a survival phrase you should know already!)

If you can, summarize the words or parts of words (morphemes) that change for each person/number.

Possessors/Owners

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	<i>my</i>	<i>our</i>
2 nd person	<i>your</i>	<i>your guys'</i>
3 rd person	<i>his/her/its</i>	<i>their</i>



10. More on subjects and objects: transitivity (ADVANCED TOPIC)

All verbs have subjects but not all verbs have objects. There are two kinds of verbs: **intransitive verbs** and **transitive verbs**.

Intransitive verbs do not have objects.

Examples: *laugh, cry, sneeze, walk, run, grow, rain*

<i>I</i>	<i>laughed.</i>	
<i>You</i>	<i>cried.</i>	
<i>She</i>	<i>sneezed.</i>	
subject	verb	(These sentences have no object.)

Transitive verbs have objects.

Examples: *kiss, kick, fix, watch, give, touch, hold*

<i>I</i>	<i>kissed</i>	<i>the baby.</i>	
<i>You</i>	<i>kicked</i>	<i>a ball.</i>	
<i>She</i>	<i>fixes</i>	<i>cars.</i>	
subject	verb	object	(These sentences all have objects.)

Not only do transitive verbs have objects, but the sentences would be ungrammatical if the objects were missing. (Ungrammatical sentences are marked with an asterix*.)

<i>*I</i>	<i>kissed</i>		
<i>*You</i>	<i>kicked</i>		
<i>*She</i>	<i>fixes</i>		
subject	verb		(These sentences are ungrammatical without objects.)

Some verbs can be intransitive sometimes and transitive sometimes.

Examples: *eat, boil, clean, break*

<i>I</i>	<i>ate.</i>	OR	<i>I</i>	<i>ate</i>	<i>apples.</i>
<i>You</i>	<i>cleaned.</i>	OR	<i>You</i>	<i>cleaned</i>	<i>the house.</i>
<i>The water</i>	<i>boiled.</i>	OR	<i>He</i>	<i>boiled</i>	<i>the water.</i>
subject	verb		subject	verb	object
	(Intransitive: no object)			(Transitive: object)	

Your languages might care much more than English does about whether the verb is transitive! Here are some things you might learn about in your language. This is an **ADVANCED** topic. We include only brief explanations here. If you are interested in working on this topic, feel free to talk to Suzanne or Aliana to learn more about it.



a. Transitivity

Your language might have a morpheme that indicates whether a verb is transitive or not. You can use this morpheme to turn an intransitive verb into a transitive verb so that it has an object. Example:

I am eating. (intransitive)
I am transitive-eating fish. (transitive)

ACTIVITY: Try to discover if your language has this, and how it works. Experiment with the sentences above and a few other verbs. Describe this here. You can ask us for help if you are not sure!

b. Causative

Making a verb causative is kind of like being double-transitive. A causative is a way of saying you make someone do something. In English, we do this the long way around with the verb “make”: *I made the baby eat.*

Your language might have a morpheme that indicates whether a verb is causative or not. You can use this morpheme to turn a transitive verb into a causative verb. Example:

I am eating. (intransitive)
I am transitive-eating fish. (transitive)
I am causative-transitive-eating the baby fish. (causative)
=‘I am making the baby eat fish.’

ACTIVITY: Every language has a way of making a verb causative. Find out how to do this in your language. Experiment with a few verbs. Translate these sentences.

“The baby is eating fish.” _____

“I am making the baby eat fish.” _____

“The child is brushing her hair.” _____

“I am making the child brush her hair.” _____

Try this with other verbs you know. Describe how this works here. You can ask us for help if you are not sure!



c. Passive

A passive is a way of undoing a transitive verb to make it intransitive. For example:

<i>John broke the window.</i>	transitive
<i>The window was broken.</i>	passive
<i>John washed the window.</i>	transitive
<i>The window was washed.</i>	passive

English makes a verb passive by changing the word order around. In English, you can also add a phrase that says who did it, such as *The window was washed by John*. Your language might keep the same order and add a passive morpheme to the verb.

ACTIVITY: Find out how to make a passive in your language. Experiment with the verbs above and a few other verbs. Describe how this works.

d. Transitivity and subjects

In section 6, we learned about subjects. In English, the subject pronoun is always the same no matter what kind of verb you use. For example:

Intransitive verb: *I laughed.*
Transitive verb: *I kissed the baby.*

We use the same subject pronoun “I” for both kinds of verbs. In some languages however, things get a little more complicated! Some languages are called **ergative, ergative-absolutive or split-ergative languages**. (Tsimshianic and Salish languages are like this.) This means that the subjects might be different depending on whether the verb is transitive or not.

Xaad Kil / Xaaydaa Kil is called an **active-stative** or **split intransitive** language. This means the subject of an intransitive verb may be different. If the subject is deliberately doing an action (called an **agent**) such as *I am swimming*, the subject will have one form. If the subject is not really deliberately doing the action such as *I am sleeping* (called a **patient**), the subject will be marked another way.

ACTIVITY: If you speak one of these languages, go over your subjects again using different types of verbs, transitive/intransitive, or active/stative, and try to figure out if the subjects are different. If you are not sure, ask us!



Intransitive verbs (Example: Salish or Tsimshianic)

What kinds of subject do you use with verbs like *laugh, cry, sneeze, walk, run, grow*?

	Singular	Plural
1 st person		
2 nd person		
3 rd person		

Transitive verbs (Example: Salish or Tsimshianic)

What kinds of subject do you use with verbs like *kiss, kick, fix, give, touch, hold*?

You might only find the third person forms to be different from the table above.

	Singular	Plural
1 st person		
2 nd person		
3 rd person		

Active Intransitives (Example: Xaad Kil / Xaaydaa Kil)

What kinds of subject do you use with verbs like *walk, run, fly*?

	Singular	Plural
1 st person		
2 nd person		
3 rd person		



Stative Intransitives (Example: *Xaad Kil / Xaaydaa Kil*)

What kinds of subject do you use with verbs like *sit, stand, to be tall*?

	Singular	Plural
1 st person		
2 nd person		
3 rd person		

11. Expanding your vocabulary

In section 2, we talked about the describing words of language. Adjectives describe nouns (*a **fat** cat*), adverbs describe verbs (*danced **gracefully***) and prepositions mostly describe locations (*danced **on** the dance floor*).

ACTIVITY: How many describing words do you know? When you learn a new word, also think about how you can describe that thing or activity. To get started, here are some lists of common describing words in English. Do you know how to say similar things in your language?

List of adjectives:

<http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/adjectives/list-of-adjective-words.html>

List of 100 adverbs:

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/index.php/pdf/articles/140.100adverbs.pdf>

List of 70 prepositions:

<https://www.englishclub.com/grammar/prepositions-list.htm>

Like we've seen before, your language may use describing words in a different way than English does. You may find that they are part of the verb. Learning how to describe things can be very useful for expanding your language.

12. Closing words

As an adult language learner, learning your language will be a lifelong journey. But that doesn't need to be discouraging! Your language is full of fun and interesting things that make it unique in the world. This resource outlines only a few of the things that you can learn. Don't stop where you are in your learning path – always keep challenging yourself to learn more and more! We are happy to help so please get in touch.

