

Instructions for Hundred Noun Phrase assignment

Referring to the lecture note slides called Noun-Phrases.pdf, and any relevant pages from the textbooks, make up 100 noun phrases. Each pronoun can count as a noun phrase. Format your pronouns in a table as shown in the slides. The remaining noun phrases should be in five-line interlinear gloss format.

Five-line interlinear gloss format: The first line shows the noun phrase in its intended orthography. The second line shows the noun phrase with hyphens marking morpheme boundaries. The third line is the gloss, which indicates the meaning or function of each morpheme. You can use abbreviations like “pl” for “plural” in your glosses, but please include a table of abbreviations. *The third line must be visibly aligned with the second line to make it easy to see what each morpheme means.* We won’t read your assignment if the second and third lines are not aligned with the second lines. The fourth line tells us what you were thinking about the design of this noun phrase. The fifth line tells us what we would say in English.

Here is an example from my conlang. I added a lot of explanation, which is not required for this assignment. But remember that by the end of the semester you will have to write a reference grammar or pedagogical grammar, so you might as well start thinking about how to explain it.

Belele (Wordkind)

1. Definiteness

The speakers of Belele are very particular about *referentiality* (whether a noun actually refers to something or is a general concept) and *common ground* (what the speaker and hearer both know and both know that the other knows). We will refer to the system of referentiality and common ground as *definiteness*. There are several definiteness markers, and each noun must have one.

1.1 The generic morpheme

The generic morpheme is *-le*. It is used in sentences like “Birds fly” where the speaker is not referring to any particular bird.

Fwele

Fwe -le

Bird -generic

Birdkind

Birds (generic, as in “birds fly”)

Nikle

Nik -le

Child -generic

Childkind
Children (generic)

1.2 The definite morpheme

The definite morpheme is *-n* after a vowel or *-an* after a consonant. It is used for a noun phrase that refers to a specific entity in the common ground between the speaker and hearer. It could be in the common ground because it has been mentioned before, is visible, or whose existence is evoked from the discourse.

Nikan
Nik -an
Child -def
The child
The child

Fwen
Fwe -n
Bird -def
The bird
The bird

1.3 The specific indefinite morpheme

The specific indefinite morpheme is *-gu*. A noun ending in *-gu* has a specific referent, but is not in the common ground between the speaker and the hearer. If I say “I bought a car yesterday” I know which car it is, but you don’t, so it is not in the common ground. “Spin” is an abbreviation for “specific indefinite”.

Fwegu
Fwe -gu
Bird -spin
A bird
A bird

We won’t get into non-specific indefinites yet because they require the use of partitive constructions “one of birdkind” or “some of birdkind”.

1.4 Relative uniqueness

Belele speakers know that nothing is ever really unique. We think the sun is unique but other solar systems have suns too. So, uniqueness is relative to someone. Uniqueness markers are defined in terms of in-group, which is, unfortunately an underspecified notion. The in-group could be a family, a class, a group of friends, or all of humanity. You have to infer from context what the in-group is.

The uniqueness markers are:

-(a)b	unique to me or my in-group
-(a)d	unique to you or your in-group
-(a)g	unique to someone else's in-group
-(a)m	unique to an in-group shared by the speaker and hearer
-(a)z	unique to everyone on the planet

We will look at several examples because these markers translate into English as null, "the", or a possessive pronoun depending on the circumstances.

Niknub

Niknu -b

Baby unique to my in group

Baby with a capital B as in "We couldn't sleep because Baby was crying" or "the baby" as in "We couldn't sleep because the baby was crying".

Ndoz

Ndo -z

God -unique to everyone

God

(Belele speakers have a lot of religions. They are all monotheistic, believing in a unique common good, although it may have many avatars. If there is only one god, then it follows logically that everyone is worshipping the same one, no matter what they call it.)

Fosaz

Fos -az

Sun -unique to everyone

The sun

Swigam

Swig -am

Teacher -unique to speaker and hearer in-group

Teacher

"Teacher" or "the teacher" or "our teacher"

malug

malu -g

School -unique to third person(s)

"Their school" or "school" as in "They went to school"

malud
malu -d
School -unique to you
“your school” or “You went to school”

Malum
Malu -m
School -unique to speaker and hearer
“School” as in “I went to school (the one we both go to)” or “Our (speaker and hearer’s) school”

2. Number

Belele has singular and plural. Singular is zero-marked (no morpheme). The plural morpheme is *-ki*. Although the language allows plural to go with all of the definiteness markers, it doesn’t commonly occur with with generic *-le* and uniqueness. The order of morphemes is plural first and then definiteness.

Fwekigu
Fwe -ki -gu
Bird -pl -spin
Birds that aren’t in the common ground
“Sm birds” as in “I saw sm birds”
 (“Sm” is the English word “some” without stress. With stress it is a quantifier. Without stress it is an indefinite plural determiner.)

Nikkin
Nik -ki -n
Child -pl -def
The children
The children

3. Modification of nouns

There are a lot of ways to modify nouns in Belele. First, Belele is a little bit polysynthetic and has some *postbases*. Postbase is a term from Eskimo linguistics. Postbases are derivational morphemes that are more meaningful than most English derivational morphemes. One of the postbases is “nu” meaning small. This is kind of a diminutive like Spanish *-ita*.

Niknun
Nik -nu -n
Child -small -def
The small child
The small child

Niknukigu
Nik -nu -ki -gu
Child -small -pl -spin
The small children
The small children

“Nu” can also be a separate word on its own, but it means the set of all things that can be described as small. Remember that speakers of Belele are very particular about referentiality. To use the word “nu” to modify a noun in Belele, it has to be individuated with *-bi* (individual) as in “nubi” (small one). “Nubi” is a noun. “Nubi” can be used in two ways. Without number or definiteness, it forms a kind of compound with another noun. In the example below, “nubi” doesn’t have number or definiteness, but “nik” (child) has number and definiteness.

Nubi nikkin
Nu -bi nik -ki -n
Small -one child -pl -def
Smallone child
The small child

But it is also possible to say:

Nubikin nikkin
Nu -bi -ki -n nik -ki -n
Small -one -pl -def child -pl -def
The small one the child
“The small child” or “the small one which is a child” or “The child which is a small one”

“Nubikin” and “nikkin” can be in either order “nubikin nikkin” or “nikkin nubikin”. And, in fact, if they are both inflected with definiteness, they don’t have to stay next to each other in a sentence. As in “Nubikin helana nikkin” (“The small child laughed” or more literally “the small one laughed, the child”.) This is called a *discontinuous constituent* in languages like Warlpiri (that’s a real human language). It is kind of like *extraposition* in English, except that in English we only extrapose relative clauses and prepositional phrases:

A man who was wearing a hat came in → A man came in who was wearing a hat
I read a book about poetry yesterday → I read a book yesterday about poetry

So, separating “nubikin” and “nikkin” is kind of like separating “a man” and “who was wearing a hat”.

I’m stopping here, but you will continue with your language to cover possessive constructions, cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, etc. If you aren’t up to a hundred, try showing all the words and morphemes in all combinations and also make up more nouns. Have fun!

