Homework #1: Discovering the Human Language

Directions:
After reading Jackendoff chapters 1-4, answer the following three questions. Try to be concise and direct in your answers, and give support/examples whenever possible. This is a graded homework. It must be typed, stapled and turned in at the beginning of class tomorrow. (Page limit: single-spaced 2 pages)

1. Discuss the significance of the sentence *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.* Include a discussion of the difference between that sentence and “Furiously sleep ideas green colorless”

2. There are many strong claims about language in Jackendoff’s first two chapters. Pick one claim or assertion that caught your attention and discuss it: What would count as evidence for this claim? How might one go about testing the claim? Do you have any evidence that bears on this claim?

   Possible examples of strong claims you might choose (you may choose one of these or a different one):
   - Any normal human being can create an indefinitely large number of sentences in his or her native language.
   - The rules of language are learned unconsciously
   - Language grows in a child's mind like physical growth
   - Language is the most accessible window into the human mind
   - We've inherited universal principles and processes that guide language acquisition

3. Do you think that particular languages might be genetically connected to the ethnic groups that speak them? (That is, are certain languages the way they are because the brains of the ethnic groups that speak them have evolved differently from other ethnic groups?)

   In your answer to this question, discuss the following:
   a) whether you think this claim is true or not, and why. Discuss how you might go about investigating this question.

   b) whether this is what linguists mean when they say humans have an innate ability to learn language. If not, explain what linguists mean when they talk about innateness.