

Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

Displaced arguments: S-O-V-X word order in Mande

Tatiana Nikitina, *Freie Universität, Berlin*

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Mande languages are characterized by a typologically unusual rigid S-O-V-X word order pattern: while objects precede the verb, all other arguments and adjuncts follow it. This pattern, which is surprisingly uniform across the family, is illustrated in (1) by an example from Susu (Creissels 2005), where the verb selects for an object and an oblique argument, expressed as a postpositional phrase; the two arguments appear on the opposite sides of the verb.

- (1) S O V [PP]
 \dot{n} $\dot{n}\dot{i}ng\acute{e}e$ $\dot{f}\dot{i}-m\grave{a}$ \dot{i} $m\acute{a}$
 1SG cow give-FUT 2SG to
 ‘I will give you a cow’

In generative syntax, the S-O-V-X word order pattern is often derived from an underlying SVO structure. Verbs are assumed to assign their theta-roles to the right but Case to the left, hence both object NPs and PP arguments can be generated in the post-verbal position, but object NPs move into the preverbal position in order to be assigned Case (Koopman 1984; Travis 1989).

In this paper, I argue against the movement-based explanation based on a detailed analysis of the syntax of postpositional arguments in Wan (Southeastern Mande). First of all, I show that in Wan, postpositional arguments do not form a constituent with the verb that selects for them and are instead adjoined to the entire finite clause. As a result, postpositional arguments of non-finite verbs never appear next to their verb but instead invariably follow the main verb, as in (2), where the verb is separated from its postpositional argument by the main verb. This evidence is problematic for movement-based accounts that presuppose that arguments originate next to the verb that subcategorizes for them.

- (2) \acute{e} $k\acute{u}n\grave{a}$ $s\acute{a}gl\grave{a}$ [$s\acute{o}g\acute{o}$ $t\grave{a}$]_{PP}
 s/he climb started horse on
 ‘She began to mount a horse.’

Secondly, postpositional arguments selected by nominalized verbs must appear after the main verb as well, often at a considerable distance from the deverbal noun, as in (3).

- (26) a. $wi\acute{a}-\eta$ $y\acute{e}$ \acute{e} $b\acute{o}$ $l\grave{a}kl\grave{u}$ $g\acute{o}$
 enter-NMLZ time DEF arrived school in
 ‘The time to enroll in school arrived.’

The pattern of obligatory non-local realization of oblique arguments challenges movement-based accounts of S-O-V-X word order and the Projection Principle of transformational grammar in general. I discuss broader implications of the obligatory non-local realization of oblique arguments for syntactic theory and suggest how this unusual property developed historically, in the context of the split predicate syntax of Mande (Kastenholz 2003, 2006; Zima 2006).

Selected references

- Creissels, D. 2005. S-O-V-X constituent order and constituent order alternations in West African languages. *Berkeley Linguistics Society* 31: 37-51.
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 Koopman, H. 1984. *The Syntax of Verbs: From Verb Movement Rules in the Kru Languages to Universal Grammar*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.