84. Order of Object, Oblique, and Verb

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1. Defining the values

This map shows the dominant order of lexical object, oblique phrase and verb. An oblique phrase is a noun phrase or adpositional phrase (prepositional or postpositional) that functions as an adverbial modifier (or "adjunct") of the verb. Of the six logically possible orders, five are attested, as illustrated in (1), where *X* stands for an oblique phrase.

(1) a. English

    Mary opened [the door]   [with a key].

             V   O   X

    b. Mandarin (Li and Thompson 1981: 390)

        tāmen   [zài fángzi-hòumian] xiūli   diànshìjī

        they   at   house-behind   repair   television

	X	V	O

'They repair televisions behind their house.'

c.   Slave (Athapaskan; northern Canada; Rice 1989: 997)

t'eere [denǫ   gha]   ʔerákeeʔee wihsį̀

girl   REFL.mother for   parka   3.made

	X	O	V

'The girl made a parka for her mother.'

d.   Nagatman (isolate; Papua New Guinea; Campbell and Campbell 1987: 8)

na [mo me] [ke   na]   hohui-në-taya

and fish OBJ   these with look.for-1.SUBJ-3PL.OBJ

	O	X	V

'And we look for fish with these.'

e.   Kairiru (Oceanic; Papua New Guinea; Wivell 1981: 151)

ei   porri tamiok a-pik   [gege-i   nat   nai]

3SG   axe   3SG-take [from-3SG child   that]

O   V   X

'He/she took the axe from that child.'

The sixth logical possibility, VXO, is not attested. There are many languages in which this order is possible, but there is no language in the sample in which it occurs as the dominant order (although it is standard in Irish with pronominal objects; Ó Siadhail 1989: 207). The map also shows languages whose word order is sufficiently flexible that there is no dominant order for these three elements (see "Determining Dominant Word Order" on p. 371). Some of these are languages with highly flexible order that are also shown on Map 81 as ones lacking a dominant order for the order of subject, object, and verb. Others are ones that have a dominant order on Map 81, but not on this map. There are a number of languages which are shown as SOV on Map 81, but which are shown as lacking a dominant order on this map because the object and oblique are apparently freely ordered with respect to each other. An example of such a language is Lower Grand Valley Dani (Trans-New Guinea; Papua, Indonesia; Bromley 1981).

@	1.	Verb-object-oblique order (VOX)	189
@	2.	Oblique-verb-object order (XVO)	3
@	3.	Oblique-object-verb order (XOV)	45
@	4.	Object-oblique-verb order (OXV)	23
@	5.	Object-verb-oblique order (OVX)	37
@	6.	More than one order with none dominant	152
			total 449

The XVO type illustrated in (1b) from Mandarin is quite rare; the only known instances are varieties of Chinese.   The rarity of this type and the nonattested status of VXO mean that VO languages are overwhelmingly VOX. But all three types of OV languages are widely attested. Among them, XOV is the most frequent on the map (45 languages), OVX next most frequent (37 languages), and OXV least frequent (23 languages). But this seriously overrepresents the true frequency of OVX, which is relatively rare in the world.   The frequency on the map is a methodological artifact, and emerges from the fact that many grammars state the ordering of O and V and of X and V but not of O

and X. In such cases, if the language is of the type OV&XV, nothing can be concluded about the ordering of O and X, and so such languages had to be omitted from the map. By contrast, if the language is of the type OV&VX, then the ordering OX follows automatically, and so the language is always included on the map. Hence the overrepresentation. If we include languages that are OV and XV but for which we were not able to determine a dominant order of X and O or for which both orders of X and O are common, we find that out of 318 OV languages, 281 are XV and only 37 are VX.

Oblique phrases include phrases expressing location (such as source and goal), instruments (as in (1a)), benefactives (as in (1c)), and comitatives (as in English *with Pat* in *I played tennis with Pat*). Indirect objects (recipients with ditransitive verbs) are not included; in some languages they pattern with the direct object, in others with obliques. Temporal expressions are not included, since in many languages they exhibit positional properties different from other obliques, often occurring at the beginning of the clause.

In English, oblique phrases are normally expressed by prepositional phrases. In many other languages, however, they do

not involve adpositions, but rather case affixes on the head noun

(and sometimes on modifiers as well), as illustrated by the

instrumental suffix in (2) from Yidiny (Pama-Nyungan;

Queensland, Australia).

(2)   Yidiny (Dixon 1977: 263)

ŋaɲi   duguɽ   balga:l   i rga:-da

1PL.SUBJ   house.ABS make.PST   blady.grass-INSTR

'We made a house with blady grass.'

In some languages, oblique phrases occur or can occur without an

adposition or case affix. In the example from Blackfoot

(Algonquian; Alberta and Montana) in (3), the only morphemes

corresponding to the prepositions *from* and *with* in the English

translations are the morphemes in the verb glossed 'SOURCE' and

'ACCOMP'; the verb itself means 'to arrive from somewhere with

someone'.

(3)   Blackfoot (Frantz 1991: 106)

nít-ohpok-oht-o'too-maw   *amá*

1-ACCOMP-SOURCE-arrive-DIRECT.3SG   this.3SG

nit-ohkíímaan-a   *Omahk-oyis-i*

1POSS-wife-ANIM.SG   big-lodge-OBV

'I arrived from Edmonton with my wife.'

For the purposes of this map, phrases like *on the table* in English *I put the book on the table,* which can be viewed as arguments of the verb, are treated as obliques, primarily because in most languages their order with respect to the verb and object is the same as clear instances of obliques. An exception is Awa Pit (Barbacoan; Colombia), in which purely optional obliques precede the object, as in (4a), while oblique arguments occur between the object and verb, as in (4b).

(4)   Awa Pit (Curnow 1997: 61, 102)

   a. *awa=na   tɨ=kasa   piya   waa-mtu*

      person=TOP stick=with   corn   sow-IMPF.PTCP

                        X   O   V

      'The Awa sow corn with a stick.'

   b. *na=na   pala   tɨm=ki   win-ta-w*

1SG.NOM=TOP   plantain   basket=at   put-PST-LOC.SUBJ

O   X   V

'I put the plantains in the basket.'

Because purely optional obliques are presumably more frequent than oblique arguments, Awa Pit is shown on the map as SXOV. There are other languages in which different types of obliques exhibit different positional preferences relative to the object. For example, in Suena (Trans-New Guinea; East Papua New Guinea), which is SOV, temporal and locative expressions tend to occur between the subject and the object, while instrumental expressions tend to occur between the object and the verb (Wilson 1974: 98); Suena is shown on the map as a language lacking a dominant order for these elements.

2. Geographical distribution

Since most VO languages are VOX, the distribution of VOX languages is similar to that described in chapter 83 for VO (though there are fewer languages shown on this map, since data on this

characteristic is available for fewer languages). As noted above, XVO order is restricted to varieties of Chinese. All three types of OV languages (XOV, OXV, and OVX) are fairly widely distributed. The distribution of OXV versus XOV order does not exhibit any particularly clear geographical pattern. OVX order, however, exhibits stronger areality. It is most common in West Africa, where it is the universal or near-universal pattern in several language groups, notably Mande and Senufo Gur, and in individual languages such as Koyraboro Senni, illustrated below. In several other West African groups, notably Kru, it occurs in alternation with VOX depending on whether an auxiliary is present (see below). It is also found in a number of languages in Australia and in Central America and adjacent areas in Colombia.

3. Theoretical issues

The typology that forms the basis of this map has rarely been discussed. The two most frequent types, VOX and its mirror image XOV, share two properties: (1) the oblique phrase occurs on the same side of the verb as the object; and (2) the object occurs

adjacent to the verb. The fact that oblique phrases occur on the same side of the verb as the object is often taken to be something so obvious as to be in no need of explanation. It is true that both are dependents of the verb, but so are subjects, and, except for Chinese, oblique phrases occur on the same side of the verb as the subject only in languages in which the object does so as well. That the object most often occurs adjacent to the verb was observed by Tomlin (1986) and conforms to general principles whereby grammatical complements should occur closer to their heads than adjuncts. But the fact that there are many OV languages which are OXV or in which objects and obliques are freely ordered with respect to each other shows that such principles governing complements and adjuncts are only tendencies.

One question is why we find the asymmetry we find between VO and OV languages: while VO languages are overwhelmingly VOX, all three types of OV languages (XOV, OXV, OVX) are widely attested. There are two questions here. The first is why OXV languages are common while their mirror image, VXO, is unattested. The second is why it is that most languages in which the oblique phrase occurs on the opposite side of the verb from the

object are OVX, rather than XVO. Neither question has an obvious answer in the literature.

A curious property of OVX languages is that many of them are SAuxOVX, placing auxiliary elements, whether verbal or nonverbal, between the subject and the object (Gensler 1994, 1997). While this phenomenon is apparently restricted to Africa, it is found in widely separated areas. Language groups in West Africa with SAuxOVX as their standard word order include Mande, Senufo (Gur), as illustrated by Supyire (Senufo; Mali) in (5a), and Koyraboro Senni (Songhay; Mali), as in (5b).

(5)   a.   Supyire (Carlson 1994: 274)

u	*sí*	*sìɲciiyí*	*cya*	*mìì*	*á*
3SG	FUT	firewood.DEF	seek	1SG	for
	Aux	O	V	X	

‘She will fetch firewood for me.’

        b.   Koyraboro Senni (Heath 1999a: 139)

ay	*ga*	*nooru*	*wiri*	*[ay*	*baaba*	*ga]*
1SG	IMPF	money	seek	1SG	father	on

‘I will seek money from my father.’

This pattern is also found in Tunen, a Bantu language which is atypically SOV and which is spoken in Cameroon, quite distant from the OVX languages in West Africa, as illustrated in (6).

(6)   Tunen (Dugast 1971: 309)

mὲ	*ná*	*mìɔkɔ*	*bokòn*	*[ò*	*nuìy]*
1SG	PST	stones	raised	LOC	river

‘I raised the stones from the river.’

The presence of SAuxOVX in distant branches of Niger-Congo suggests that this order may be reconstructible for Niger-Congo. Plausibly, the S-TAM-O-V morphological order (where *TAM* stands for ‘tense-aspect-mood’) which is characteristic of the verb in most Bantu languages represents a grammaticalization of the syntactic SAuxOV pattern, further supporting the reconstruction.

This special status of SAuxOVX also extends to a number of other languages in Africa in which OVX alternates with some other word order. In various language groups, notably Niger-Congo languages of West Africa, SAuxOVX alternates with auxiliary-less

SVO. This is found in Ewe and in Kru, as illustrated in (7) for

Grebo (Kru; Liberia).

(7)   Grebo (Innes 1966: 102, 103)

    a.   *ne   du-da   bla   ne*

         I   pound-DIST.PST   rice   PTCL

         'I pounded rice.'

    b.   *ne   yi   bla   du-i*

         I   IMPF   rice   pound-IMPF

         'I am pounding rice.'

A more complex case is found in Moru-Ma'di languages (Central Sudanic, Nilo-Saharan; Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo). Here, we find a two-way opposition conditioned by syntactic factors and tense/aspect: auxiliary-less SVO versus S(Aux)OVX. This is illustrated in (8) for Ma'di (Uganda), (8a) illustrating the AuxOV order, (8b), the OVX order.

(8)   Ma'di (Blackings and Fabb 2003: 441, 364)

    a.   *má   rǐ   dʒɔ́   `sī-rē̄*

    1SG   PROG   house   NONPST.build-SUBORD

'I was/have been building a house.'

b.   *ɔ́pɨ*   *ká*   *bɔ̀ŋgú*   *dʒè*   *sàbúnì*   *sɨ̌*

    Opi   3SUBJ clothes   wash   soap   SOURCE

'Opi is washing clothes with soap.'

Similar facts obtain in Lendu and Ngiti, languages belonging to a different branch of Central Sudanic from the Moru-Ma'di languages, but spoken close by. Similarly, in Dinka and Nuer (Nilotic; Sudan) the word order varies with a number of factors, but in main clauses containing an auxiliary, the dominant order is SAuxOVX.