

Deriving SOVX word order in Mandinka

Mande languages exhibit an unusual SOVX word order: subjects and one object precede the verb, while adjuncts and other arguments follow (1).

- (1) kambanoo je kitaboo dii suŋkutoo la
boy PERF book give girl OBL
'The boy gave a/the book to a/the girl.' (Mandinka)

Koopman (1992) proposes that internal arguments and VP-adjuncts merge within a head-initial VP: SOVX order arises when one internal argument obligatorily raises to a preverbal position while all other elements remain within the VP. However, Nikitina (2019) claims that postverbal elements, including NP arguments, are not in the same constituent as the verb, and instead are located in a high, clause-adjoined position. I show that Mandinka binding, word order, and pronominalization facts support the former analysis.

First, preverbal objects can serve as antecedents for postverbal reciprocals (2). Since anaphors must be bound by c-commanding antecedents, the postverbal object must be in a position low enough to be c-commanded by the preverbal object.

- (2) Aisatu je dindiŋo-lu jitandi **joo** la faŋfelendaŋo kaŋ
Aisatu PERF child-PL show each.other OBL mirror in
'Aisatu showed (the) children to each other in a/the mirror'

I also show that quantified expressions in preverbal objects can bind postverbal pronouns, and postverbal R-expressions are ungrammatical with preverbal object antecedents. Since all of these binding phenomena are widely understood in terms of asymmetrical c-command, they favor a Koopman-style approach in which the postverbal object remains within the VP, while the preverbal object raises to a position that c-commands it.

Furthermore, I show that postverbal NP arguments must appear left of postverbal adjuncts, while other postverbal elements are not subject to this restriction. Given the traditional assumption that arguments are generated closer to the verb than adjuncts, this is expected if postverbal NPs are VP-internal ((3); note that the part of (3) in red in fact parallels English double object constructions in word order).

- (3) Aisatu je kitaboo **dii (*koteŋke) dindiŋo-lu la (koteŋke)**
Aisatu PERF book give again child-PL OBL again
'Aisatu gave (the) children a/the book again.'

Finally, I show that Mandinka VPs may be replaced with the pro-form *a ke* ('do it'). Postverbal NPs must be included in this pronominalization, while postverbal adjuncts are excluded (4-5). I argue that this is a test for VP-constituency, which shows that postverbal NPs are part of the VP, while adjuncts are not.

- (4) ŋ ŋa kitaboo dii Fatu la kunuŋ, Musa je a ke bii
1SG PERF book give Fatu OBL yesterday Musa PERF 3SG do today
'I gave a/the book to Fatu yesterday, Musa did it today.'
- (5) *ŋ ŋa kitaboo dii Fatu la, Musa je a ke Aisatu la
1SG PERF book give Fatu OBL Musa PERF 3SG do Aisatu OBL
'I gave a/the book to Fatu, Musa did so to Aisatu.'

In sum, the syntactic evidence from Mandinka suggests that postverbal NP arguments stay in a low, VP-internal position. This favors an analysis where postverbal NPs stay within VP (like Koopman's) over an analysis where they are located in a clause-adjoined position (like Nikitina's).

References:

- Koopman, Hilda. 1992. The absence of case chains in Bambara. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 10:555–594.
- Nikitina, Tatiana. 2019. Verb phrase external arguments in Mande: New evidence for obligatory extraposition. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 37:693–734.