

LINGUIST 168 Introduction to Linguistic Typology

LECTURE 17: WORD ORDER TYPOLOGY

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Plan for today

- review poll
- ergative alignment vs. S and O
- defining basic word order
- clause-level word order
- correlations with phrase-level word order

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Review: Agglutinating morphology

Parameter of **exponence**:

How much information can be packaged into (= expounded by) one morpheme.

agglutinating

Turkish*

ev	-ler	-i
house	-PL	-ACC
‘the houses (ACC)’		

West Circassian

wəne	-xe	-m
house	-PL	-OBL
‘the houses (OBL)’		

Latin*

dom	-os
house	-PL.ACC
‘houses (ACC)’	

fusional

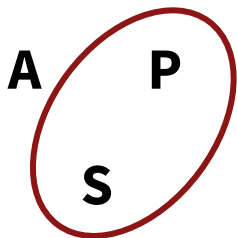
Russian

dom	-ov
house	-PL.GEN
‘houses (GEN)’	

ACC = accusative;
GEN = genitive;
OBL = oblique;
PL = plural.

Review: Ergative-absolutive alignment

ergative



absolutive

Dyirbal (Pama-Nyungan)

yabu	numa-ngu	buran
mother(ABS)	father-ERG	saw
'father saw mother'		

numa	yabu-ngu	buran
father(ABS)	mother-ERG	saw
'mother saw father'		

numa	banagan ^{yu}
father(ABS)	returned
'father returned'	

Review: reduplication as a type of affixation

Ponapean (Austronesian): **prefixation**

duhp	‘dive’	du -duhp	‘be diving’
mihk	‘suck’	mi -mihk	‘be sucking’
wehk	‘confess’	we -wehk	‘be confessing’

Mangap-Mbula (Austronesian): **suffixation**

kuk	‘bark’	kuk- uk	‘be barking’
kel	‘dig’	kel- el	‘be digging’
kan	‘eat’	kan- an	‘be eating’

Review: flexibility

- how much **allomorphy** there is in a language
- **allomorphy:**

one grammatical
meaning



several different morphemes
depending on word it attaches to

- declension classes
- conjugation classes
- paradigms

Review: Allomorphy in English verbs

infinitive	simple past	past participle
sing	sang	sung
drink	drank	drunk
see	saw	seen
eat	ate	eaten
drive	drove	driven
show	showed	shown
bake	baked	baked
walk	walked	walked



ablaut (vowel change)

ablaut / -en

-ed / -en

-ed

Review: head-marking

- agreement on the verb is **head-marking**

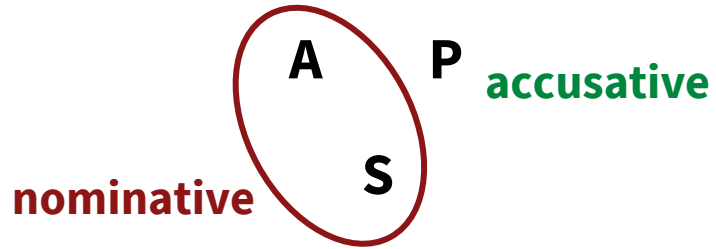
She	dances
dependent	head

Plan for today

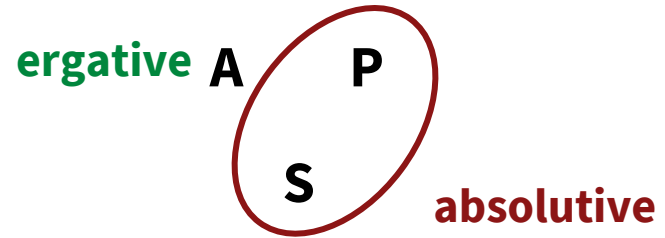
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Alignment

Nominative-accusative



Ergative-absolutive



Parallels between absolutive and nominative

Absolutive ~ nominative

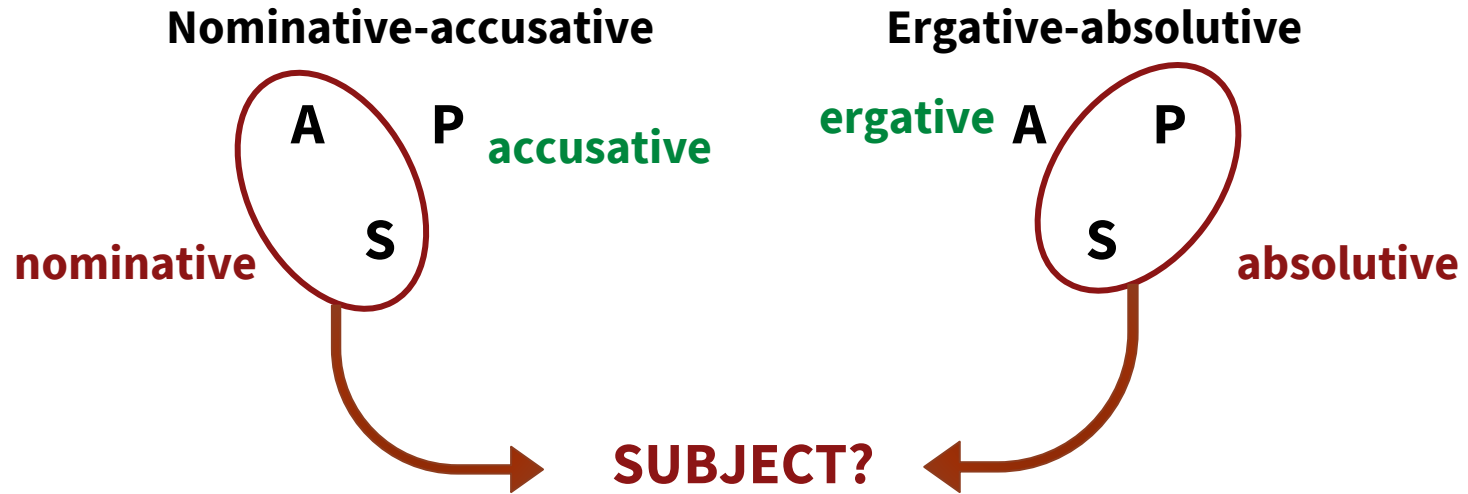
- usually unmarked (-Ø)
- the form of the sole argument of an intransitive verb (S)

= subject?

Ergative ~ accusative

- usually marked (= overt affix)
- only used when there is more than one argument (A and P)

Alignment



Question

Clause-level word order typology uses the notions **S O V**
Why do ergative-absolutive languages pose a challenge for
this typology?

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Word order permutations

- English is generally claimed to have rigid SVO word order.
- But in certain contexts, other orders are possible.
- E.g. OSV or VOS *Examples?*

- Why aren't those orders included in the typology?

Basic word order

- **not** every order possible
- flexible word order \neq no basic word order

markedness

Sentence is

- stylistically neutral
- independent (= not embedded)
- indicative (= not a question, exclamation or imperative)

Arguments are

- full noun phrases
- subject is an agent, definite and human
- object is a patient and definite

Verb is

- a prototypically transitive action

Russian: flexible word order

Dʒevotʃka	sjela	konʃjetu.
girl.NOM	ate	candy.ACC
‘The girl ate the piece of candy.’		

Konʃjetu	sjela	dʒevotʃka.
candy.ACC	ate	girl.NOM
‘A girl ate the piece of candy.’		

SVO

- ✓ neutral, independent, indicative
- ✓ definite noun phrases
- ✓ prototypical transitive verb
- ✓ human subject

OVS

- ✗ indefinite subject

Russian: flexible word order

Dʒevotʃka	tʲebʲa	sjest.
girl.NOM	you.ACC	will eat
'The girl will eat you.'		

SOV

X object is a pronoun,
not a noun phrase

Dʒevotʃkʲe	nʲe nraʋʲitsʲa	konʃʲeta.
girl.DAT	not like	candy.NOM
'The girl doesn't like the candy.'		

OVS

X verb is not prototypically
transitive action

Dryer 2013: Russian is classified as SVO.

Other factors for determining basic word order

- frequency








Most frequently occurring word order in natural language corpora.

- information structure and intonation (focus, topics, etc.)
- Common metric: most natural order in an answer to the question

“What happened?”

Are the factors for flexible word order the same across languages?

Clause level word order typology

Value	Representation
 Subject-object-verb (SOV)	564
 Subject-verb-object (SVO)	488
 Verb-subject-object (VSO)	95
 Verb-object-subject (VOS)	25
 Object-verb-subject (OVS)	11
 Object-subject-verb (OSV)	4
 Lacking a dominant word order	189
Total:	1376

most common

very rare

<https://wals.info/chapter/81>

Universal about order of subject and object

In declarative sentences with nominal subject and object, the dominant order is almost always one in which **the subject precedes the object**.

Why is this so rare?

What type of universal statement is this?

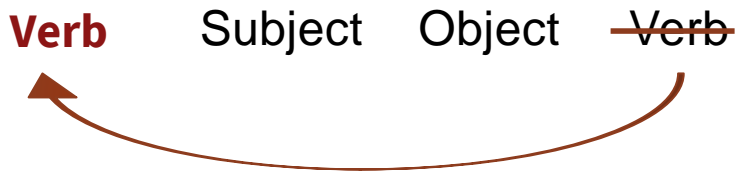
Greenberg, J.H. 1966. Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements. In *Universals of language*. MIT Press.

Song, J.J. 2011. Word order typology. In *The Oxford handbook of typology*. OUP.

Discussion question

Why are verb initial languages so rare?








- information structure: topics tend to come first, verbs are rarely topics
- potential structural explanation: verb-initial orders are usually derived



Issues with verb~subject~object typology

- no generalizations about intransitive verbs
- question of frequency:
utterances with full definite noun phrase S and O are uncommon
- ergative languages:
does $S = A$ and $O = P$? Is that always the case?
- may miss generalizations

>1 basic word order






Value	Representation
 Subject-object-verb (SOV)	564
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- some languages have no basic word order
- many languages in this category have >1 basic word order

<https://wals.info/chapter/81>

2 basic word orders

Any generalizations?

	Value	Representation	
	SOV or SVO	29	SV
	VSO or VOS	14	VS and VO
	SVO or VSO	13	VO
	SVO or VOS	8	VO
	SOV or OVS	3	
	Total:	67	

<https://wals.info/chapter/81>

Order of subject and verb

Value	Representation
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Subject precedes verb (SV)	1192
<input type="radio"/> Subject follows verb (VS)	194
<input type="radio"/> Both orders with neither order dominant	110
Total:	1496

much more common!

“In languages in which the position of subjects in intransitive clauses differs from that in transitive clauses, **the map shows the order in intransitive clauses.**”

Question

Considering the two distinct typologies:

- order of verb, subject and object
- order of verb and subject (of intransitive verb)

What generalizations about word order correlations might we be missing?

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Ergative word order

Muna (Austronesian)

Verb

S

notende	tora	dahu
ran	again	dog
'The dog ran again'		

A




Verb

P

o	katogha	nembolaku	kenta	topa
	the crow	stole	fish	dry
'The crow stole dried fish.'				

https://wals.info/combinations/81A_82A#1/18/153

Order of verb and object

	Value	Representation
	Object precedes verb (OV)	712
	Object follows verb (VO)	705
	Both orders with neither order dominant	101
	Total:	1518

<https://wals.info/chapter/83>

Grouping word order types

Value	Representation	
● Subject-object-verb (SOV)	564	OV
● Subject-verb-object (SVO)	488	VO
● Verb-subject-object (VSO)	95	
◇ Verb-object-subject (VOS)	25	
◇ Object-verb-subject (OVS)	11	OV
◇ Object-subject-verb (OSV)	4	
● Lacking a dominant word order	189	
Total:	1376	

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Word order correlations

Verb ~ object

Object ~ verb

Noun ~ possessor

Possessor ~ noun

Preposition ~ noun phrase

Noun phrase ~ postposition

Noun ~ relative clause

Relative clause ~ noun

Adjective ~ standard of
comparison

Standard of comparison ~
adjective

Verb ~ object correlations

Rapa Nui (Austronesian)

verb

object

He	to'o	te	tenitō	i	te	moni
PAST	take	the	Chinese	ACC	the	money
'The Chinese took the money.'						

noun

possessor

te	hoi	o	te	tagata
the	horse	GEN	the	man
'the horse of the man'				

preposition **noun**

ki	Boston
to	Boston
'to Boston'	

Verb ~ object correlations

Rapa Nui (Austronesian)

noun

relative clause

te	tani	rapanui	[noho	oruga	o	te	miro]
the	other	Rapa Nui	stay	upon	GEN	the	boat
'the other Rapa Nui people who stayed on the boat'							

Object ~ verb correlations

Ainu (isolate)

	object	verb
Totto	amam	esose.
mother	rice	borrowed
‘The mother borrowed rice.’		

noun	postposition
pis	ta
shore	at
‘at the shore’	

possessor	noun
sapo	ninkarihi
sister	earrings
‘sister’s earrings’	

relative clause	noun
[Tokaci wa ek]	perekur
Tokachi from come	young.person
‘the young man who came from Tokachi’	

Activity

Verb ~ object

Object ~ verb

Noun ~ possessor

Possessor ~ noun

Preposition ~ noun phrase

Noun phrase ~ postposition

Noun ~ relative clause

Relative clause ~ noun

Adjective ~ standard of
comparison

Standard of comparison
~ adjective

Are these generalizations true for English?