A Note on Word Order in Proto-Salish

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1. A structural principle

2. The generation of person markers

3. The order of main words and person markers in Salish

4. Order within person markers

1. The recent revival of interest in historical patterns of changing word order stems from the fact that fundamental principles of language appear to be at work. Greenberg (1963) suggested a number of universals on the linear occurrence of grammatical elements dependent on the basic order of S(ubject), V(erb) and O(bject), with the ordering of the latter restricted to three basic types – VSO, SVO, SOV. Lehmann (1973) has proposed a structural principle of language based upon these findings. Reducing the three basic types to two – VO and OV, and using Q to represent verbal qualifiers such as negatives, interrogatives, and causatives, he proposes that languages will have most naturally QVO or OVQ ordering. This is the result of a principle which states that languages tend to protect the relation between verb and object from interruption by verbal qualifiers. Lehmann goes on to show that this principle can be used to establish earlier patterns of a language. Presumably the basic word order will change first, leaving an intermediate period where the Q will remain in its original position. Later, the structural principle in operation will change the place of the nonconforming elements. For example, the change of an OV language to a VO one would have the following stages: OVQ to VQO or VOQ to QVO. Other things being equal, the knowledge of such a principle allows us to consider systems with VQO or VOQ as transitional ones, representative of an earlier SOV order.

    In this note, I would like to propose a structural principle of the same kind which concerns the relation between the basic word order of S, V, and O in sentences and the order of person markers (or affixes) on verbs, and exemplify from Salish how this principle can be used to establish an historically earlier word order. Givón (1971) has shown in an important paper on this subject how synchronic morphology can be used to determine earlier syntactic patterns. He noted that the position of pronouns can reflect earlier word order. For example, Spanish is a SVO, as seen from (1)a.

(1)a. yo compré   los   libros   'I bought the books'
       I buy-past Det   book-pl

   b. yo los   compré   'I bought them'
       I   them buy-past

When the pronoun is used as in (1)b, however, the order is SOV. It is the latter which reflects the historically earlier pattern. The principle which I propose is in operation here is the following one:

(2) In a structurally balanced system, a person marker will occur on the same side of a verb as the NP to which it refers.

Systems that violate this are in transition, with the person marker holding the original position of the NP. Like Lehmann's principle, this one can be used to reconstruct the earlier patterns of basic word order.

2. Person markers that occur on verbs are different from pronouns in that their appearance is to some degree independent of normal operations of anophora or pronominalization (c.f. Ingram, 1970). They are often necessary in every sentence, and refer to the person (and in some cases the number and gender) of an earlier NP in the sentence. This can be exemplified in Chipewyan (Li, 1946), which is typical of Athabaskan. The basic word order is SOV.

(3) s ɛ-tθu ɛ   sa   kɗn   ɸ-θɛ-t-tsi
     my-grandson   for me   fire he-perfect-classifier-make
     'my grandson made a fire for me'

In addition, the verb carries prefixes to mark pronominal subject and object.

(4) ɸ-y ɛ-t-tsi
     he-it-classifier-makes

Using small s and o for subject and object person markers, the order in Chipewyan is S(O) s-o-V. The object NP is in parentheses to mark the fact that the object marker is only incorporated onto the verb if the object NP is deleted. The literal translation of (3) would be 'my grandson he-made a fire for me.' A language which had both s and o in all sentences would have a translation 'my grandson he-made-it a fire for me.' There is apparently a continuum of degrees to which information about person is redundantly marked on verbs.

To account for such markers in a generative grammar, elsewhere (Ingram 1970, 1971) I have proposed that they result from transformations that copy them from the relevant NP onto the verb. This was done in an attempt to limit the possible categories that occur on verbs in underlying representations as well as provide a straight forward transformational account of their occurrence. Given the copying proposal, the question arises whether or not there are any constraints on the transformations that copy elements in this fashion. Emonds (1972) discusses minor movement rules which move nonphrase categories such as person markers. He suggests that such rules are limited by movement past a limit of one node. The principle in (2) is based on an assumption such as Emond's that there is a distance limitation on such movements. If so, then VSO languages should have person markers to the right of the verb, and SOV to the left. Those that violate this ordering would reflect a transitory period during which time the surface order of S,V, and O have changed but the person markers have not yet.

3. The Salish language family consists of several languages located primarily in Washington and southern British Columbia, (c.f. Thompson 1973). There are two main divisions, Coast Salish and Interior Salish, both which have the basic word order of VSO. In addition, Salish languages have person markers as affixes or clitics to the verb.

At first glance, Salish appears to be a straightforward VSO language family. The Coast Salish languages, as well as the geographically isolated

It is difficult to argue changes in Salishan word order using VSO terminology. Salishan Lgs. are basically predicate-first, whether this predicate corresponds to I.E. V, S, or O

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Tillamook to the South and Bella Coola to the North, have the pattern V-o-s S O. Some examples are:

(5) a. Bella Coola (Davis and Saunders, 1973)
         kʼx-i-s   ti-ʔimlk-tx   ci-xnas-cx   'The man sees the woman'
         see-her-he Prox-man-Art Prox-woman-Art

    b. Upper Chehalis (Kinkade, 1964)
        swə́š-t-n   tat   ƛ̓ə́šƛ̓š   'he's pulling a stick'
        pull-it-he Det stick

    c. Squamish (Kuipers, 1967)
        na   ʔipʼís-t-∅-as   k°əci sʔnə́m   'he had a spear'
        fact take-trans-it-he a   spear

This is consistent with the principle in (2). The Interior Salish can also be divided into two subgroups, the North and the South. The orth languages also have the same pattern (Thompson, tIllooet, and Shuswap). In (6) an example is given from Lillooet, taken from Van Eijk (1973), that shows the V-o-s pattern.

(6) g̊°əl-n-c-éš   'he scolds me'
     scold-trans-me-he

     The Southern Interior languages, on the other hand, present an interesting divergence. These are Kalispel, Okanagan, Columbian and Coeur d'Alene. These languages, in varying degrees, show the occurrence of ~~proclitics~~ person markers prefixed to the verb. I will limit the discussion to Kalispel, ~~at lear~~ based on Vogt's (1940) grammar. Kalispel has three sets of person markers, two transitive and one intransitive. The completive set has the pattern V-o-s S O, much like the Coastal patterns, except that the first person singular object is a prefix, i.e. o-V-s.

(7) a. kúp-∅-txᵘ   'you push him'
        push-him-you(sg)

    b. kúpən-c-s   'he pushes you'
        push-you(sg)-he

    c. ku-kúpən-txᵘ   'you push me'
        me-push-you(sg)

The continuative set, however, is predominantly prefixed. It has the pattern o-s-V S O, with an alternative o-V-s S O. Three of the subject markers are prefixed, and two are suffixed.[1]

(8) a. ku-a-skúp-əm   'you are pushing me'
        me-you(sg)-push-continuative

    b. ku-y-eskúp-əm   'I am pushing you'
        you(sg)-I-push-continuative

    c. pi-y-eskúp-əm   'I am pushing you'
        you(pl)-I-push-continuative

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[1]These are taken directly from Vogt (1940, p. 33). There are a number of phonological processes in operation here. The underlying form for 'me' [y], for example, is /in-/. The specification of these, however, is beyond the purpose of this note.

It is difficult to accept these conclusions on Salishan word order using ka (or Ok) as a basis for argument. The qeʔ and kʷu elements appear innovative, not retained (these would represent marked categories, which should be less conservative than unmarked ones).

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(8) d. ku-eskÚp-əm-p   'you are pushing me'
      me-push-cont-you(pl)

   e. ku-eskÚp-əm-s   'he is pushing me'
      me-push-cont-he

   f. qe-eskÚp-ɫel-s   'he is pushing us'
      us-push-us-he

Traditionally this distinction has been treated as a descriptive fact, i.e. that some Interior languages prefix pronouns whereas the others suffix. Here, however, it is claimed that this difference has important historical implications. This Kalispel pattern is in violation of the structural principle in (2). In a transformational account of Kalispel that starts from an underlying VSO order, it will need to take O person markers and move them all the way to the front of the verb. The simplest grammar would be one with an SOV structure with a late rule that moves the verb to the front. This, I suggest, represents a more general trend of Salish from an original SOV order to a VSO one, with a subsequent shift in the position of the person markers. The current situation is one where all the languages are now VSO, but the ones in Southern Interior have not yet completed the concomitant shift of person markers from the left of the verb to the right.

I would like to offer the following additional observations which support this possiblity. First, if the language has shifted from SOV to VSO with a subsequent shift of the person markers, one could expect an intermediate stage in which the position of the person markers freely fluctuates. This, in fact, is found in Columbian (Kinkade, personal communication) where person clitics can either precede or follow the preidicate.

(9) a. kən tqnÚxʷ   'I'm hungry'
    I   hungry

   b. tqnÚxʷ kən   'I'm hungry'
    hungry I

According to my proposal, Columbian is in the midst of moving the person clitics after the verb in keeping with its basically VSO order. Also, Kinkade has informed me that Columbian is phonologically one of the most conservative Salish languages. Its possible syntactic conservatism then is at least consistent with this phonological characteristic. Secondly, the possessive affixes in Salish are predominantly suffixed, except for the first and second person singulars which are prefixed. This is exemplified in Upper Chehalis--"The possessive morphemes are{n-} first person singular, {ʔa-} second person singular, {-s} third person singular, {-ɫ} first person plural, {-nalp} second person plural, and {-syams} third person plural. The first two precede the noun, the others are suffixes" (Kinkade, 1964, p. 251). The prefixation ff the first two suggests an earlier period when all possessives proceded the noun. As discussed by Lehmann (1973), this is a characteristic of SOV languages.

4. A further refinement of (1) concerns the order of the person markers in regards to each other, e.g. o-s-V versus s-o-V. In the Kalispel data, the orders o-s-V and V-o-s both occurred. This suggests that the copying proceeds from the verb out, i.e. NPs to NPs NP o-V to NP NP o-s-V in the

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former, and V NPs NPo to V-s NP NPo to V-o-s NP NP, in the latter. This is only suggestive, however, since the complicating factors are many. For one thing, some languages order according to person rather than function, e.g. first person before second before third. Also, some languages merge subjects and objects, so that ordering in these cases is not clear. Lastly, some languages only copy one or the other, so that again order is not at stake. Such further considerations, however, do not affect (2), which I propose as a principle worthy of further investigation.

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