

Evidence for subject-verb-object word order in Proto Oceanic

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原オセアニア語の語順SVOの根拠

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〈概 要〉

オセアニア諸語は、ほとんどの場合に、無標のSVOの語順を示すが、例外として、パプア・ニューギニア南部のパプアン・ティップ語群は、無標のSOVの語順を示す。しかし、その語群に属しているモトゥ語の語形成は、原型がSVOの語順であったことを示唆している。モトゥ語の動詞は、主語に相当する接頭辞と直接目的語に相当する接尾辞をとる。また、形容詞と副詞の順序と直接目的語の名詞の位置は、動詞文末の類型に矛盾している。したがって、現在のモトゥ語のSOVの語順は、その語順を示す非オセアニア諸語との接触によって変化したもので、原オセアニア語の語順はSVOであったと考えられる。また、パプアン・ティップ語群の他の言語に関しても、同様の変化が生じた可能性が考えられる。

Abstract

Although most Oceanic languages have an unmarked subject-verb-object word order, the Papuan Tip Cluster of Oceanic languages in southern Papua New Guinea has an unmarked subject-object-verb word order. Evidence from one of these languages, Motu, indicates an original subject-verb-object word order; Motu verbs have subject and direct object affixes which are in a subject-verb-object order and both the order of adjectives and adverbs and the position of nominal direct objects are inconsistent with a verb-final typology. The contemporary subject-object-verb word order in Motu and by implication the other Papuan Tip languages is probably the result of contact with neighbouring non-Oceanic languages which have a subject-object-verb word order and the original word order in Proto Oceanic was subject-verb-object.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the evidence for an original subject-verb-object (SVO) word order in Proto Oceanic, the reconstructed ancestor of the Oceanic languages. The Oceanic languages, spoken across the South Pacific from Papua New Guinea in the west to the Polynesian islands in the east, are a subgroup of the Austronesian language family. Other subgroups of the Austronesian family language are found in Madagascar, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and among the aborigines of Taiwan.

The vast majority of Oceanic languages have a basically SVO word order. There are, however, a number of Oceanic languages which have object-verb typology. The only geographically extensive group of Oceanic languages in which this occurs is the Papuan Tip languages of southern Papua New Guinea, virtually all of which have subject-object-verb (SOV) word order. The fact that nearly all other Oceanic languages have SVO word order, and the fact that the Southern Papua New Guinean verb-final Oceanic languages are in close contact with non-Austronesian languages with the same verb-final typology, suggest that the original word order of Proto Oceanic was SVO. Given the relative ease of borrowability of syntactic typology (see Ross 1988), the mere preponderance of a particular typology in a language family is not conclusive evidence of a similar typology in the protolanguage. But if internal reconstruction of the SOV Oceanic languages can show that their original word order was SVO, there is no reason to conclude that the word order of Proto Oceanic was not SVO.

This paper will compare the order of verbal clitics in Motu, a SOV Oceanic language of southern Papua New Guinea, with those in the Jabem and Kuanua languages. Jabem (also spelt Yabêm and Yabim) and Kuanua (also known as Tolai) are two Oceanic languages with SVO typology which are spoken on the northeastern New Guinea mainland and on eastern New Britain, respectively.

These two languages have been chosen in part because, like Motu, they are important regional *lingue franche* and therefore have reliable grammatical descriptions. They have also been chosen because, together with Motu, they represent the three major 'clusters' which Ross (1988) has claimed descended from a Proto Western Oceanic dialect chain that remained in the New Britain area after the ancestors of the speakers of the Admiralties and Eastern Oceanic languages departed. Motu belongs to Ross'

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Papuan Tip Cluster, Jabem to his North New Guinea Cluster, and Kuanua to his Meso-Melanesia Cluster.

Evidence from the order of clitics in all three languages suggests a SVO typology in their common ancestral language. This is supported by two apparent anomalies in Motu syntax. Evidence from the taxonomy of language universals posited by Greenberg (1963) will show that these anomalies can be explained if an earlier SVO word order is posited for Motu or its ancestor.

2. Evidence from clitics

The most noticeable evidence for an earlier SVO word order in Motu comes from the differing word orders of the verbal subject and object agreement clitics and the nominal subjects and objects in a sentence. In studies of languages outside of Melanesia, the dichotomy of verbal clitics and overall sentence word order has been used as evidence in historical syntactic reconstruction. For example, even though most Bantu languages have SVO word order today, Taimy Givon has postulated an earlier SOV word order because of the fact that verbal agreement prefixes are in the order SOV (Comrie 1981: 210). As Comrie has pointed out, this analysis is based on three assumptions: (1) 'that verb agreement affixes invariably develop diachronically from pronouns', (2) 'that bound morphemes invariably derive from independent words' and (3) that once fused into a single word, 'the order of the morphemes is thereafter not subject to change' (Comrie 1981: 209). He has gone on to give counterexamples to these absolutes from Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian, but has concluded that the exceptions are so rare that even if these three assumptions are not hard and fast rules, they do 'retain a certain statistical validity' (Comrie 1981: 210). Using evidence from the Mongolian languages, Comrie (1981: 211) has insisted, however, that the reconstruction which results from this analysis of clitics represents only one, and not the only, possible word order in the ancestor language, and it must be corroborated with other data.

The relationship between clitic and sentence-level word order in Motu mirrors that of the Bantu languages; the verb stem is preceded by a subject agreement clitic and followed by an object agreement clitic (i. e., SVO), while the order of the actual constituents in the sentence as a whole is normally SOV, e.g.,

Motu:

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	VERB
			S-V-O
(1)	<i>Tau ese</i>	<i>mero</i>	<i>e-boia-ia.</i>
	man SM	boy	3:s-hit-3SG:O
	'The man is hitting th boy.'		

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	VERB
			S-V-O
(2)	<i>Tau ese</i>	<i>memero</i>	<i>e-boia-idia.</i>
	man SM	boys	3:s-hit-3PL:O
	'The man is hitting the boys.'		

Both Jabem and Kuanua have subject agreement clitics which precede the verb and have the same function as their counterparts in Motu, e. g.,

Jabem (from Zahn 1940: 16):

(3)	<i>Aê ka-kô.</i>	<i>Eng kê-kô.</i>
	I 1SG-stand.	he 3SG-stand
	'I stand.'	'He stands.'

Kuanua (from Mosel 1984: 94):

(4)	<i>A tutan i-ian.</i>	<i>A tarai dia-vana.</i>
	the man 3SG-eat	the men 3PL-went
	'The man ate.'	'The men went.'

Besides this correspondence in function between the Motu subject agreement clitics and their counterparts in Jabem and Kuanua, there also seem to be cognates between the Motu and Jabem clitics. The subject clitics shown in Figure 1 are used in non-future non-negative sentences in Motu (special portmanteau particles are used in negative or future sentences, the use of which is not directly pertinent to the argument at hand).

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first person	<i>na-</i>	(singular)
	<i>ta-</i>	(plural inclusive)
	<i>a-</i>	(plural exclusive)
second person	<i>o</i>	(singular and plural)
third person	<i>e-</i>	(singular and plural)

Figure 1. Motu subject clitics
(from Lister-Turner and Clark, n. d.: 11)

The clitics shown in Figure 2 are used in Jabem (with some variation for different verb classes). These clitics are striking in their similarity to their Motu equivalents. The first person plural clitics are the same in both Motu and Jabem. With the second and third person singular clitics, the Motu forms are identical with the alternate Jabem forms. The two Jabem forms reflect different clitics used with different verb classes.

first person	<i>ka- or ja</i>	(singular)
	<i>ta-</i>	(plural inclusive)
	<i>a-</i>	(plural exclusive)
second person	<i>kô- or ô</i>	
third person	<i>kê- or ê</i>	(singular)
	<i>sê-</i>	(plural)

Figure 2. Jabem subject clitics
(from Zahn 1940: 16, 34, and 62)

The Kuanua subject clitics are not cognate with their Motu and Jabem equivalents. They seem to represent a different development, since they are either identical to the Kuanua independent pronouns or are shortened forms of them (Mosel 1984: 93). This is in contrast to the Jabem and Motu subject clitics, which have no apparent relationship with their independent equivalents.

Whereas all three languages have obligatory subject clitics, only Motu has obligatory object clitics, which are shown in Figure 3. These are the same as the inalienable possessive suffixes except for third person singular, for which the inalienable possessive suffix is *-na*. With the exception of first and second person singular, these clitics are also all shortened versions of the independent pronouns, e. g., *-mui / umui* and *-dia / idia*. In fact, the third person plural clitic *-dia* seems to be a reflex of the Proto Western Oceanic third person plural disjunctive pronoun **idri(a)* (Ross 1988), which also appears, for example, in Kuanua as the third person plural subject marker *dia* and independent pronoun *diat*.

	singular	plural
first person	<i>-gu</i>	<i>-da</i> (inclusive) <i>-mai</i> (exclusive)
second person	<i>-mu</i>	<i>-mui</i>
third person	<i>(i) a</i>	<i>-dia</i>

Figure 3. Motu obligatory object clitics
(from Lister-Turner and Clark, n. d.: 11)

It is noteworthy that in Motu, although there are independent subject pronouns, there are no independent object pronouns. In the following sentence, for example, there is no overt direct object except the third person singular verbal clitic *-ia*:

Motu (from Lister-Turner and Clark, n. d.: 12) :

- (5) *Lau* *na-kara-ia*.
I 1SG:S-carry-3SG:O
'I'm carrying it.'

This is in contrast to Jabem and Kuanua, which both have independent object, as well as subject, pronouns. This can be seen in the following Kuanua sentence in which the direct object is the independent pronoun *iau* 'I':

Kuanua (from Mosel 1984: 16) :

- (6) *A* *tutuna* *i-gare* *iau*.
the man 3SG-see I
'The man saw me.'

It is unlikely that the appearance of an object marker in Motu is a syntactic borrowing from neighbouring non-Austronesian languages rather than a language-internal development. While Wurm (1971: 370) has mentioned that the members of the Southeast New Guinea Phylum, i. e., the non-Austronesian neighbours of the Papuan Tip Oceanic languages, do have subject agreement suffixes, he has not mentioned the existence of any object agreement markers. There is verb agreement for object number in the Koiari-Manubara-Yareba Stock of non-Austronesian languages which immediately border the Motu-speaking area, but this is accomplished with different verb stems rather than suffixation (Wurm 1971: 571).

3. Evidence from language universals

Comrie (1981: 206) has quoted Theo Vennemann as claiming that typological inconsistencies in the syntax of a language arise from a change in the order of the verb in the sentence, i. e., that as the verb changes position some, but not all, of the typology of the new word order is adopted. Thus, while the primary evidence for an original SVO word order in Motu comes from the order and nature of the subject and object verbal clitics, there is also some supporting evidence from two inconsistencies between the order of constituents in Motu and what one would expect from language universals such as those which Greenberg (1963) found in his examination of languages belonging to a number of different families around the world.

One of these inconsistencies involves the order of adjectives and adverbs. According to Greenberg's Language Universal 21, if adverbs follow the adjectives they modify, then adjectives will follow the noun and a nominal object will follow the verb (Greenberg 1963: 69). In Motu adverbs such as *herea* 'very' follow the adjectives they modify, e. g.,

Motu:
(7) *namo* *herea*
 good very
 'very good'

As Greenberg's universal would suggest, adjectives in Motu do follow the noun they modify, e. g.,

Motu:
(8) *tau* *namo-na*
 man good-3SG
 '(a) good man'

However, as has been seen in example (1) above, the verb (*eboiaia* 'hit') is sentence-final and does not precede the nominal object (*mero* 'boy'). This inconsistency can be explained if it is assumed that the original word order of Motu or its parent language was not verb-final.

The second inconsistency in Motu syntax is its lack of agreement with Greenberg's Language Universal 25, according to which '(i)f the pronominal object follows the verb, so does the nominal object' (Greenberg 1963: 72). As has been discussed above, there are

no independent object pronouns in Motu, but the object particles correspond to the independent object pronouns of Jabem and Kuanua and, when there is no nominal object, carry all the information that an independent pronoun object would. It is therefore reasonable to consider them equivalents of pronominal objects.

If that is so, this language universal indicates that the nominal object should also follow the subject. It does not, as the following pair of sentences indicates. Example (9) has a nominal object *tau* ‘man’ which appears before the verb *naitaia* ‘see’, while in example (10) there is no nominal object. In both sentences the verb ends with a third person objective clitic *-ia*.

Motu:

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| (9) | <i>Lau</i> | <i>ese</i> | <i>tau</i> | <i>na-ita-ia.</i> |
| | I | SM | man | 1SG:s-see-3SG:O |
| | ‘I see the man.’ | | | |
| | | | | |
| (10) | <i>Lau</i> | <i>ese</i> | <i>na-ita-ia.</i> | |
| | I | SM | 1SG:S-see-3SG:O | |
| | ‘I see him/her/it.’ | | | |

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that there is evidence indicating that Motu, which today has SOV word order, once had SVO word order. If this is so, and assuming that Motu is typical of the other Papuan Tip Oceanic languages, it is likely that the original word order of Proto Oceanic was SVO.

The most weighty evidence for this is the order of subject agreement clitics before the verb stem and the object agreement clitics after the verb stem. The Motu subject agreement clitics seem to be cognate with those in Jabem, but the object agreement clitics have no counterpart in the other Papua New Guinean Oceanic languages examined and are actually cognate to some extent with independent pronouns in Kuanua. This, and the fact that clitics are often derived from unstressed independent words, suggest that they were independent pronouns at a time when the basic word order of Motu was SVO.

The order of the verbal clitics alone would not be sufficient evidence to postulate an earlier SVO word order in Motu or its parent language. But supporting evidence for this view comes from inconsistencies between Motu syntax and the typology of a verb-final postpositional language predicted by language universals. One such inconsistency is the

fact that adverbs in Motu follow the adjectives they modify. Another is that Motu nominal objects precede the verb while ‘pronominal’ (actually clitic) objects do not.

The original word order in Motu would therefore appear to have been SVO, which is the predominant word order in Oceanic languages. Because there is no evidence to suggest that Motu has had a different history than the other Papuan Tip Oceanic languages, this can also be taken to have been the original word order of the Papuan Tip languages as a whole. Because of the absence of any other extensive group of verb-final Oceanic languages and because these aberrant SOV languages are geographically confined to southeastern Papua New Guinea where they are in contact with non-Austronesian SOV word order, the word order of Proto Oceanic, the reconstructed ancestor of the Oceanic languages, is also SVO.

Notes

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2. Data for Jabem are taken from Zahn (1940), for Kuanua from Mosel (1984), and for Motu from Lister-Turner (n. d.) and my own field notes.
3. The following abbreviations are used in examples :

M	marker	1	first person
O	object	3	third person
PL	plural	-	morpheme boundary
S	subject	:	portmanteau morpheme
SG	singular		
V	verb		

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