

The (non-)influence of information structure on Tunen syntax

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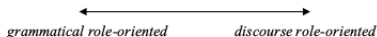


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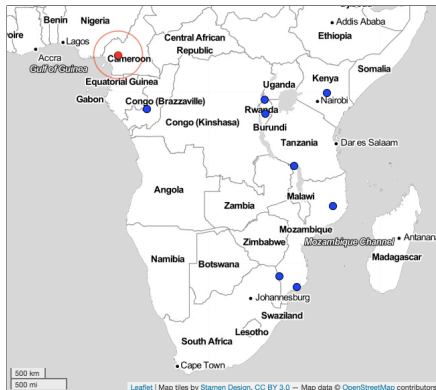


The BaSIS project

- BaSIS project RQ: To what extent is the syntax of Bantu languages determined by **grammatical roles** (subject, object) versus **discourse roles** (topic, focus, contrast etc.)?
- BaSIS hypothesis: Languages vary in extent to which syntax reflects information structure (cf Kerr et al. to appear; this conf.)



Tunen and the BaSIS project



- **Tunen** (A44/tvu) as Northwestern Bantu: less agglutinative morphology, no inversion constructions
- Particularly unusual in having OV syntax (while being otherwise head-initial) (+ other unusual properties of Mbam group (A40/60))

Tunen and the BaSIS project

- Previous work on Tunen includes a grammar, texts, + studies on syntax (Dugast 1971, 1975; Isaac 2007; Kongne n.d.; Mous 1997, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2014)
- Mous: Tunen has agent expressed as subject, but also has IS influence: *á* “contrast marker” with OV/VO alternation (VO for contrastive focus on object), *bé-* middle voice prefix, discontinuous noun phrases for contrast on nominal modifiers

“[Tunen] thus forms **an optimal test case as a language in the middle of the continuum** [between grammatical role and discourse-role based syntax]”

(BaSIS proposal, p.7)

Outline

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§1 Introduction

§2 3 case studies from PhD thesis on Tunen syntax and information structure:

- OV versus VO
- Focus expression and the *á* marker
- Discontinuous DPs

§3 Discussion

§4 Conclusion

Case study 1: OV versus VO

OV or VO?

- Mous (1997, 2005) presents Tunen as having alternation between OV and VO, where VO used for contrastive focus on object

(1) Baka **bekana** talak o yɔkɔ.

ba-ka **be-kana** tala-aka o yɔkɔ
SM.2-PST3 8-basket put-DUR PREP 7.chair

‘They put baskets on the chair.’

(Mous 1997:125, adapted)

(2) Ana indi **a monɛ**.

/a-na indiə **a** **monɛa**/
SM.1-PST2 give PRT money

‘S/he gave MONEY.’

(Mous 1997:126, adapted)

OV/VO and IS in Benue-Congo

- Güldemann (2008) discusses OV/VO alternations in Benue-Congo as reflecting IS status of object; OV as extrafocal
- e.g. IAV focus position of Aghem (Bantoid, Cameroon):

(3) a. fíl á m̀̀ á'z̀̀ zí kí-bé.
 friends 3P PST yesterday eat CL-fufu
 'The friends ate FUFU (not yams) yesterday.'

b. fíl á m̀̀ bé-'kí zí á'z̀̀.
 friends 3P PST fufu-CL eat yesterday
 'The friends ate fufu YESTERDAY (not two days ago).'

c. fíl á máà bé-'kí á'z̀̀ zí.
 friends 3P PST.PF fufu-CL yesterday eat
 'The friends DID TOO eat fufu yesterday.'

(Watters 1979:148-50, cited in Güldemann 2008:94)

Fieldwork study

- My fieldwork: Test influence of IS (and TAM) on OV versus VO in Tunen by controlling discourse context using BaSIS methodology (van der Wal 2021)

OV or VO?: Findings

- Fieldwork findings: VO strategies much less common than expected from description of Mous
 - OV consistent in elicitation (VO variably accepted/rejected)
 - study of 400 utterances from natural speech found only 2 examples of VO (cf Levshina et al. 2023:27-9 for suggestion of 300 clauses as minimum sample size for stable results on word order flexibility)
- Instead, OV (specifically S-TA-O-V-X) is consistent across discourse contexts (thetics, VP focus, focus on objects, PCF) and should be treated as the unmarked word order

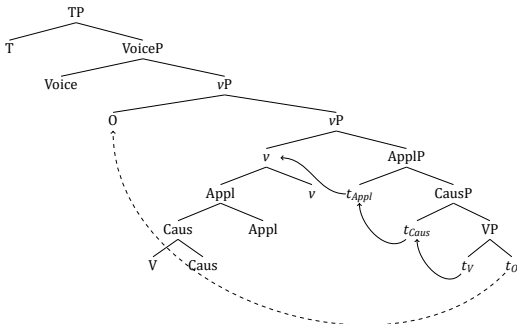
Formal analysis

- Syntactic diagnostics show that, aside from the VP, Tunen is consistently head-initial; disharmonic Aux-O-V word order
- 3 types of formal analysis of Aux-O-V word order considered:
 - Roll-up movement (driven by [+V[^]]) (Sheehan et al. 2017)
 - Head movement (Julien 2002; Zeller 2013; van der Wal 2022, i.a.) modified by addition of object shift
 - Base-generation of OV (Haider 2010, 2013; Sande et al. 2019)

Formal analysis

- Syntactic diagnostics¹ motivate analysis type 2: head movement of verb + formally-driven object shift to SpecvP

(4)

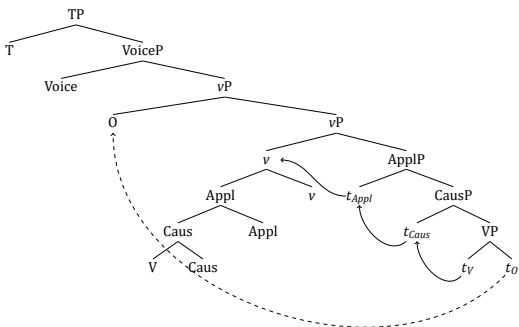


¹Bantu verbal morphology (derivational extensions), headedness diagnostics, negation test, adverb placement test, O-V-X, discontinuous DPs, voice prefix *bé-*, in-situ subjects, lack of aspectual distinctions in FV.

Formal analysis

- Syntactic diagnostics motivate analysis type 2: head movement of verb + formally-driven object shift to SpecvP

(5)



⇒ **OV is derived synchronically by a formal movement feature, not by IS considerations**

Case study 1: Findings

- Tunen is quite rigidly OV; OV is the unmarked, basic word order, compatible with multiple IS contexts
- Tunen is otherwise consistently head-initial
- Proposal: disharmonic S-TA-O-V-X word order is derived synchronically through head movement + object shift which is **formally conditioned** (i.e., not IS-driven)

Case study 2: Focus expression and the *á* marker

The *á* marker: Mous' overview

- Mous: *á* is a **contrast** marker preceding the noun (= marker of contrastive focus; Mous p.c.), which is in a postverbal position when contrastive

(6) Ana indi **a monɛ**.

/a-ná indiə **a** **monɛa**/
SM.1-PST2 give PRT money
'S/he gave MONEY.'

(Mous 1997:126, adapted)

⇒ **Monoclausal analysis** of *á* as contrast/focus marker

Copula → focus marker as biclausal → monoclausal

- Copula from clefts → focus marker grammaticalisation = biclausal to monoclausal (viz. Harris and Campbell 1995)
- Biclausal clefts composed of copula + NP_{FOC} + relative clause

á and cleft status in Tunen

- In Tunen, relative clause environment is not always distinguishable, but can be diagnosed by certain TAM marker alternations in 3rd degree past tense, negatives, and in the tone of 1SG, 1PL, 2SG, 2PL and class 1 subject markers
 - These diagnostics show that basic clefts and reverse pseudoclefts are still **biclausal** in Tunen
- á still functions synchronically as the specificational/identificational copula, rather than being a generalised focus marker as part of a monoclausal focus construction

Fieldwork findings: Reverse pseudoclefts

- For ex-situ expression of object focus, **reverse pseudoclefts** are the most common strategy (not the VáO construction!)
- These constructions are **biclausal**

Reverse pseudocleft

NP_{FOC} + á + reduced relative

- (7) **nɛlala á babá á ^Lná húánána ɔwón.**
 /**nɛ-lala á babá á ^Lná húánána ɔ-ónɔ/**
 5-spider COP 1.father SM.1.REL PST3.REL must INF-kill
 ‘C’est [l’araignée]_{FOC} que papa doit tuer.’
 ‘It’s [the spider]_{FOC} that dad has to kill.’ [PM.70.61]

What about the VáO construction?

- VáO construction not found in natural speech, but initial field data showed that it was accepted as an alternative to the OáV reverse pseudocleft
- In previous work I hypothesised that the VáO construction was equally biclausal, but recent remote elicitation via WhatsApp shows more monoclausal properties:

(8) *babá á ^Lna húánána ɔwónɔ á nɛlɛl.

/babá á ^Lna húánána ɔ-ónɔ á nɛ-lɛlɛl/
 1.father SM.1.REL PST3.REL must INF-kill á 5-spider

Intd.: Papa ne doit tuer que [l'araignée]_{FOC}.'

Intd.: 'Dad has to kill (only) [the spider]_{FOC}.' [PM.70.62]

Fieldwork findings: The VáO construction

- VáO construction not found in natural speech, but initial field data showed that it was accepted as an alternative to the OáV reverse pseudocleft
- In previous work I hypothesised that the VáO construction was equally biclausal, but recent remote elicitation via WhatsApp shows more monoclausal properties:

(9) babá **a ka** húánána ɔwónɔ **á nélal**.

/babá **a** **ka** húánána ɔ-ónɔ **á nɛ-lala**/

1.father SM.1 PST3 must INF-kill á 5-spider

'Papa ne doit tuer que [l'araignée]_{FOC}.'

'Dad has to kill (only) the [spider]_{FOC}.'

[PM.70.57]

⇒ Here, *á* functions more like a focus/contrast marker

Case study 2: Findings

- Proposal of biclausal cleft analysis in contrast to Mous' monoclausal contrast analysis
- *á* patterns more like specificational/identificational copula than a contrast marker, and has not grammaticalised into a generalised focus/contrast marker (but *VáO* construction is different)

Case study 3: Discontinuous DPs

Discontinuous DPs in Tunen

- Tunen allows a nominal modifier to be split from the noun it modifies (S-O-V-Mod), a rare example of discontinuity in Bantu (Van de Velde 2022:909)
- Previous work: Such discontinuous nominal expressions are used for contrast on modifier (Mous 1997, 2003)

(10) m̀è-ná ìm̀it̀è ỳè m̀^ẁə̀nífí índí m̀è-ḡéḡ
 1SG-HOD.PAST 9:calabash 9:of 6:water give:H 9-big
 ò h̀èl̀óbát̀ò
 LOC 19:child

‘I gave the BIG water calabash to the child.’

(Mous 1997:133; Mous 2003:305)

Discontinuous DPs for other IS

- But Isaac (2007) shows that the construction is also found in Dugast (1975) texts to introduce new discourse referents
- And these constructions showed up unexpectedly in my fieldwork:

(11) Context: ‘What do you see?’ (focus = whole DP)

mé ndɔ́ **túnɔni** sinə **tólál**.

/mɛ ^Hndɔ́ **tɔ-^Hnɔni** sinə **tɔ-^Hlálɔ́**/

SM.1SG PRES 13-bird see 13-three

‘Je vois [trois oiseaux]_{FOC}.’

‘I see [three birds]_{FOC}.’

[EO, 397]

Discontinuous DPs for other IS

- By controlling discourse context, we see that S-O-V-Mod discontinuity is actually compatible with multiple IS contexts, not just contrastive focus on the modifier
- ⇒ *contra* expectations from Mous (1997, 2003) and crosslinguistic work on discontinuous DPs as reflecting split in IS status (see e.g. Contiguity Principle, Principle of Iconic Distance)

Discontinuous DPs: Form

- Tunen discontinuous DPs differ from those found in other languages formed via IS-driven movement to the left periphery (e.g. Chichewa; Mchombo 2004 *et seq.*)
- Inventory of splits in Tunen:
 - Only pull splits of N-V-Mod form are possible (no inverse splits Mod-V-N; cf contiguous DP Dem-N-Adj-Num/Q order)
 - Numerals, quantifiers, and adjectives can be split (associative cannot)

Discontinuous DPs: Analysis

- 2 types of formal analyses:
 - Base-generated as separate DPs (e.g. with Mod as VP adverb)
 - Movement analysis (subextraction/Copy+deletion)
- Language-internal evidence² argues against an adverbial analysis in which the modifier is a VP adverb
- Proposal: Splits arise in Tunen as a **side-effect of formally-driven object movement** (Case study 1), rather than being driven by IS

²Noun class morphology on modifiers vs. uninflected adverbials, availability of discontinuity with adjectival modifiers, lack of event-level semantic interpretation.

Case study 3: Findings

- S-O-V-Mod discontinuous constructions are found in multiple IS contexts beyond contrast on the nominal modifier and are therefore not principally conditioned by IS
- Proposal: Syntactic discontinuity arises as side-effect of **formally-driven** object shift mechanism that derives Tunen's OV word order

Discussion

Discussion: Syntax and IS

- Findings from 3 studies support thesis that Tunen syntax is structured primarily around grammatical role relations, with discourse role relations less important
 - Contrast to other Bantu languages of BaSIS language which have greater influence of IS, and also contrast to other Benue-Congo languages with synchronic IS-driven OV/VO alternations / dedicated focus positions
- ! NB: This is not to say there is **no** influence of IS on Tunen syntax!

Discussion: Implications

- Diachronic picture: Innovation of disharmonic AuxOV syntax from VO base (Mous 2005, 2014; Kerr submitted)
- Tunen may well have previously had an IS-conditioned alternation between OV and VO (viz. Güldemann 2008), but synchronically, movement of object is formally-conditioned
- Difference from neighbouring languages Nyokon and Tikar, which show TAM-dependent OV/VO alternation (Mous 2005, 2014, 2022; Kerr submitted)
- The rigidity of S-Aux-O-V-X is similar to Mande, but the underlying syntax is significantly different; independently innovated disharmonic word order in the clausal domain

Conclusion

Conclusion

- Tunen shows interesting differences from Eastern and Southern Bantu languages in terms of the relationship between syntax and information structure
- Tunen is also interesting compared to other languages of the Northwest Bantu region in its innovation of OV syntax
- Thesis: Tunen syntax has grammaticalised into being conditioned primarily by grammatical role, with IS having less influence synchronically
- 3 case studies: OV versus VO word order, focus expression and the *á* marker, discontinuous DPs of S-O-V-Mod type

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Glosses/abbreviations

Glosses: 1, 2, 3... = Bantu noun class marker; 1S(G), 1PL = 1st person singular, plural; 2S(G) = 2nd person singular; APPL = applicative; ASSOC = associative (=connective) marker; CAUS = causative; COP = copula; DEF = definite, DEM = demonstrative; DUR = durative; EMPH = emphatic (pronoun); DJ = disjoint verb form; FOC = focus marker; FUT = future tense; FV = final vowel (Bantu); INF = infinitive; LOC = locative; NEG = negation; PAST1 = first-degree past tense (just now); PAST2 = second-degree past tense (hodiernal); PAST3 = third-degree past tense (yesterday); PFV = perfective; PRS = present tense; POSS = possessive; PREP = preposition; PRON = pronoun; PROX = proximal; RED = reduplicant; SM = subject marker; TAM = tense/aspect(/mood) marker

Abbreviations: Aux = auxiliary; C = complementiser node (pragmatic domain); Cop = copula; Comp = complement clause; Compl = complement clause; DO = direct object; DP = determiner phrase (\approx noun phrase); Gen = genitive; IO = indirect object; IS = information structure; MSB = Macro-Sudan Belt; mvt = syntactic movement; NOM = nominalised; O = object; PNC = Proto-Niger Congo; S = subject; T = tense node (inflectional domain); TP = tense phrase (inflectional domain); V = verb; V2 = verb-second, vP = verbal projection above VP and below voice domain, VP = verb phrase; X = obliques (non-S/O arguments and adjuncts)

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