

OV in Bantu: The syntax of Tunen

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Clausal word order in Bantu

- Bantu languages, when seen from a grammatical role perspective, have VO (**verb-object**) clausal word order (Heine 1976; Downing and Marten 2019, a.o.), e.g. (1)

(1) N-jûchi **zi-ná-wá-lum-a** a-lenje
 10-bee SM.10-PST-OM.2-bite-FV 2-hunter
 ‘The bees bit them, the hunters.’

(Chichewa; Bresnan and Mchombo 1987:744)¹

¹Glosses here and throughout adapted for consistency.

Clausal word order in Bantu

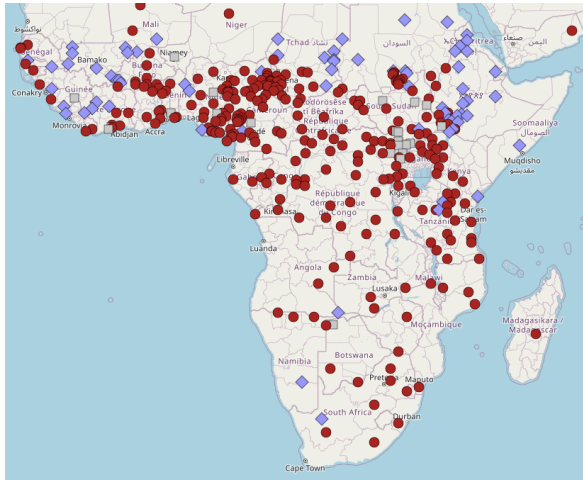
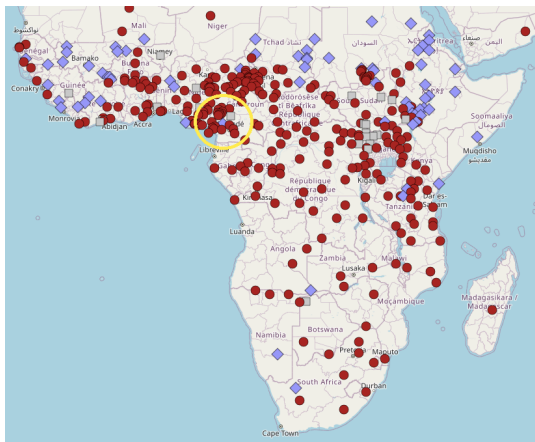


Figure: WALS feature 83A (order of O and V) (Dryer 2013).
 Red circle = VO, blue diamond = OV, grey square = no dominant order.

The Tunen exception

- Tunen (Bantu A44, Cameroon) as exception to the Bantu pattern: coded as **OV**



Tunen clausal word order

(2) Àná mònέ **índì.**
 SM.1.PST2 money give
 'S/he gave money.'

(Mous 1997:126)

⇒ OV, not VO clausal word order

OV in Tunen: Previous accounts

- Mous (1997, 2014, 2005, 2003) describes OV in Tunen as basic, with VO used for contrastive objects (i.e. contrastively-focussed objects; Mous p.c.)
- Such an IS-based characterisation is taken up across the literature (see e.g. Bearth 2003; Güldemann 2007; Downing and Marten 2019)

OV in Tunen: Previous accounts

- Güldemann (2007) groups Tunen as part of broader phenomenon on object position in Benue-Congo (vs OV in West Africa): OV when object extrafocal, VO for (contrastively) focussed objects
- e.g. Aghem (Grassfields Bantu, Cameroon)
Immediate-After-Verb (IAV) focus position

IS-conditioned OV in Aghem

- (4) a. fíl á m̀ à'z̀́ zí kí-bé.
 friends 3P PST yesterday eat CL-fufu
 'The friends ate FUFU (not yams) yesterday.'
- b. fíl á m̀ bé-'kí zí á'z̀́.
 friends 3P PST fufu-CL eat yesterday
 'The friends ate fufu YESTERDAY (not two days ago).'
 (Aghem; Watters 1979:148-50, cited in Güldemann
 2007:94)

Limitations of previous accounts

- However, Güldemann (2007:96, 98) acknowledges that the Tunen data are less clear-cut than for Aghem: OV in Tunen is *less focal*, rather than non-focal
 - Mous (1997, 2014, 2005, 2003)'s data also somewhat restricted; lack of discourse context and based on limited fieldwork (+ study of Dugast 1971, 1975 data)
- ⇒ Today: Results from PhD study testing interaction between IS and OV in Tunen + investigating other factors conditioning OV syntax

Talk outline

Talk outline

§1 Intro

§2 Background

§3 Results

§4 Analysis

§5 Discussion

§6 Conclusion

2. Background

Language background

- Tunen: Guthrie no. A44, ISO 639-3 tvu
- Predominantly spoken in *Centre/Littoral* regions of Cameroon, 35000+ speakers (approx. 70000)
- Niger-Congo > [...] > Benue-Congo > Bantoid > Bantu²
- Tunen as Mbam³ language (Guthrie no. A40/A60)



²Tunen is sometimes considered as non-Bantu Bantoid.

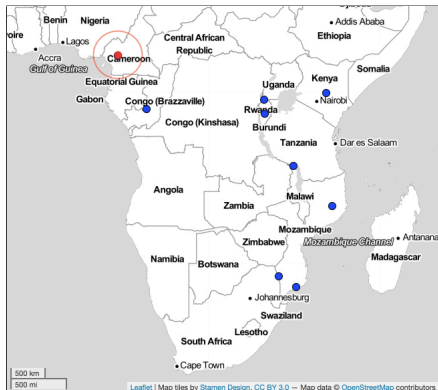
³NB: Mbam ≠ Mbam-Nkam: the latter are a different group (within Grassfields Bantu).

BaSIS project

- PhD study as part of the Bantu Syntax and Information Structure (BaSIS) project (PI Jenneke van der Wal, 2017–2023), Leiden University



- Subproject on the influence of information structure on Tunen syntax



Research questions

- Central RQ of thesis: To what extent is Tunen's syntax influenced by information structure?
- Today's sub-RQs:
 - RQ1. What effect does IS have on OV word order?
 - RQ2. What (other) restrictions are there on OV word order?

Methodology

- Methodology: In-situ fieldwork in Ndikiniméki/Yaoundé; 2 x 3.5 months (restricted due to COVID-19)
- Fieldwork supplemented by secondary sources (e.g. Dugast 1971 grammar, Dugast 1975 text corpus) + some remote elicitation via WhatsApp in 2022/2023



Methodology

- Field sessions conducted in French; 10 consultants (M/F, age range 30-70), Toboange (main), Hiling' and Fombo dialects
- BaSIS project methodology (Van der Wal 2021): elicitation in controlled discourse context + natural speech
+ draft version of CHAOS/C08 questionnaire (ms Gisbert Fanselow†, Potsdam University)



3. Results

OV and IS

RQ1

What effect does IS have on OV word order?

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- Hypothesis from previous work: OV when object is extrafocal, VO for (contrastive) focus on object

OV and IS

RQ1

What effect does IS have on OV word order?

- Hypothesis from previous work: OV when object is extrafocal, VO for (contrastive) focus on object
- Methodology: Test word order/IS using controlled discourse contexts in elicitation, combined with analysis of natural speech (Van der Wal 2021)

Object focus: OV

- Object focus: tested for Q/A context (information focus), corrective focus, contrastive focus
- Object focus result: OV (or reverse pseudocleft)

(6) What did Maria apply? (term focus on object)

Malía a ná biléliə **ɸɸókíə**.

/Malía a ná bɛ-léliə **ɸɸókíə**/

1.Maria SM.1 PST2 8-varnish anoint.DUR

‘Maria applied [the varnish]_{FOC}.’

(JO 2518)

VP focus: OV

- VP focus: focus on the entire VP, including object
- VP focus result: OV

- (7) Context 1: What did Maria apply? (term focus on object)
 Context 2: What did Maria do? (VP focus)

Malía a ná bilóliə **fɔ́kiə**.

/Malía a ná bɛ-lóliə **fɔ́kiá**/

1.Maria SM.1 PST2 8-varnish anoint.DUR

‘Maria applied [the varnish]_{FOC}.’

‘Maria [applied the varnish]_{FOC}.’

(JO 2518)

Other PCF: OV

- Other Predicate-Centred Focus (PCF) (e.g. focus on truth value truth focus, TAM focus, SOA focus): object is non-focal
- PCF result: OV

(8) Context: ‘Do you see the sheep?’ (truth focus)

mé nd(ɔ) endómbá **sin**.

/mɛ ^Hndɔ ɛ-ndómbá **sinə**/

SM.1SG PRS 4-sheep see

‘Je vois les moutons.’

‘I see the sheep.’

[EO 695]

Summary of RQ1 results

Property	Word order
Thetics	OV
] Object focus	OV
Sub-NP focus	OV
VP focus	OV
Other PCF	OV

What about VO?

- VO almost entirely absent;⁴ biclausal reverse pseudocleft preferred strategy for contrastive focus
- In elicitation, VO generally judged ungrammatical; sometimes produced but judged ungrammatical by same speakers

⁴For full clauses; VO (V-IO-DO) is the order in affirmative imperatives.

What about VO?

- In natural speech, no clear-cut examples of VO in study of 400 clauses:
 - 1 case of secondary predication (*híána munen* ‘become Munen’)
 - 1 case with hesitation/processing (*I see ... a cow*)
 - 1 case with object in French (*he wrote “Dieu hait les méchants”*)
 - 1 case which could be analysed as fronted object in next clause, modified DP construction (*leaves bad* ‘the bad leaves’)
- (examples in appendix)

Summary of RQ1 results

- OV found across IS contexts, including term focus on object
 - VO almost entirely absent; biclausal reverse pseudocleft preferred strategy for contrastive focus
- ⇒ Tunen should not be analysed in terms of VO basic word order with OV as IS-conditioned variant (cf Mous 1997; Güldemann 2007)

RQ2: On the nature of the O slot

RQ2

What (other) restrictions are there on OV word order?

RQ2: On the nature of the O slot

RQ2

What (other) restrictions are there on OV word order?

- We have already seen that OV is found across IS contexts
- Is OV restricted by other factors?

RQ2: On the nature of the O slot

RQ2

What (other) restrictions are there on OV word order?

- Clausal factors investigated:
 - (IS context)
 - TAM context
 - Affirmative vs negative polarity
 - Matrix vs embedded clause status

Clausal factors: Results

- (IS context): consistent OV
- TAM context: consistent OV
- Affirmative vs negative polarity: consistent OV
- Matrix vs embedded clause status: consistent OV

⇒ OV order is consistent across clause types

Negative polarity: OV

OV in negative and affirmative clauses alike:

(10) *mε lé ndɔ tunəni ʒkɔ.* (Neg-O-V, Tunen)

/mε **lɛ** ^Hndɔ tu-nəni **ʒkɔ**/
 SM.1SG **NEG** PRS 13-Nen understand
 'Je ne comprends pas la langue Tunen.'
 'I don't understand the Tunen language.'

Embedded clauses: OV

- (11) a. Malía a ná láá ásea Jḥánes(ε) á ndo bilíbilíbí **nyɔ** ɔ
wayéá ómbél.

/Malía a ná laa a-séá Jḥánesε a
1.Maria SM.1 PST2 say SM.1-say 1.Johannes SM.1

^Hndo bε-líbilíbí **nyɔ** ɔ wayéá
PRS 8-chilli.pepper cultivate PREP POSS.PRON.1.3

ɔ-mbéla/

3-house

‘Maria a dit que Johannes cultive des pilipilis chez lui.’
Maria said that John grows chillies at home.’ [JO 2450]

- b. *Malía a ná láá ásea Jḥánes á ndo **nyɔ** bilíbilíbí.
[JO 2451]

RQ2: On the nature of the O slot

RQ2

What (other) restrictions are there on OV word order?

- Object factors investigated:
 - Syntactic type of object
 - Thematic type of object
 - Definiteness of object
 - Specificity of object
 - Heaviness of object
 - Status of object as (un)incorporated

RQ2: On the nature of the O slot

RQ2

What (other) restrictions are there on OV word order?

- Object factors investigated:
 - Syntactic type of object: pronominals/NPs/modified NPs
 - Thematic type of object: no restriction
 - Definiteness of object: no restriction
 - Specificity of object: no restriction
 - Heaviness of object: heavy objects possible
 - Status of object as (un)incorporated: clearly non-incorporated objects possible

⇒ OV order is consistent across object types

Multiple objects

- NB: The preverbal O slot in Tunen can take multiple noun phrase objects (in strict Recipient-Theme order, regardless of IS context; Kerr to appear *a*)

(12) Context: ‘Who is the woman giving a gourd to?’ + photo
from BaSIS stimuli

a nó ɔsókó hɛtété **indi**.

/a nó ɔsókó hɛ-tété **índiə**/

SM.1 PST1 1.other 19-gourd give

‘Elle donne une gourde à l’autre.’

‘She gives a gourd to the other (woman).’

[PM 1541]

Summary of RQ2 results

- Tunen's preverbal O position is the general O position, not restricted by syntactic type of object, IS status of object, thematic type of object, definiteness/specificity of object, heaviness of object
- OV is found in both main and embedded clause types, across TAM contexts, in both affirmative and negative clauses
- The preverbal 'O' position can take both the recipient and theme object in a double object construction (NB: locative objects must be postverbal)

4. Analysis

Tunen's syntax

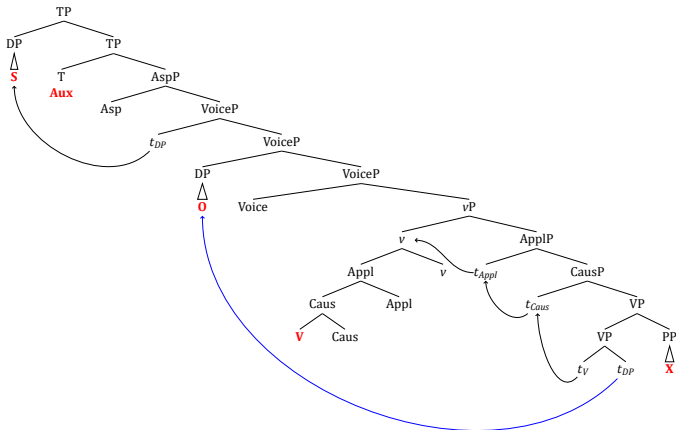
- Besides OV, how different is Tunen's syntax from other Bantu?
- Headedness properties show that Tunen is otherwise consistently head-initial (Kerr to appear *a*)
- Tunen: split in predication between SM+TAM cluster and verb, but verb parallels narrow Bantu in its derivational suffixes ('extensions'), e.g. causative, diminutive (Mous 2003; Kongne Welaze 2010)

Building a formal model

- Thesis: Investigation of 3 different formal models of Aux-O-V clausal disharmony in generative literature:
 1. Roll-up approach (as applied to Aux-O-V in Germanic dialects);
 2. Head movement approach (as applied to Bantu verbal morphosyntax) + object movement;
 3. Base-generation approach (as applied to Aux-O-V in W. African languages)

Formal analysis

(13)



⇒ Tunen's basic S-Aux-O-V-X word order is derived in parallel way to S-V-O-X order in other Bantu, with addition of object movement (+ lower level of verb movement, reflecting lack of aspectual encoding on final vowel)

Formal model

- Proposal in a nutshell: Tunen Aux-O-V is derived through object movement from an underlyingly VO structure parallel to that of narrow Bantu

i.e., Tunen OV syntax is not derived (synchronically) by IS, and is captured by a single innovation in the model

5. Discussion

Discussion: Diachronic extension

- Synchronically, Tunen has consistent OV order; OV is the unmarked word order, not an IS-variant of an unmarked VO pattern
- What about the historical situation?

Discussion: Diachronic extension

- Mous (2005, 2014), Kerr (to appear): OV as recent innovation in Tunen
- Mous (2005, 2014): VO→OV grammaticalisation from nominalised V in infinitival constructions
- cf Güldemann (2007) hypothesis of Benue-Congo OV as IS-conditioned variant of VO

Discussion: Diachronic extension

- Diachronic extension to formalism: Tunen object movement as previously driven by IS-trigger?
- cf analyses of $OV \rightarrow VO$ variation in other families, e.g. Germanic (Struik and Van Kemenade 2020; Struik 2022, a.o.)

Discussion: Comparative perspective

- Relation with OV elsewhere in West/Central Africa?
- Tunen order specifically S-(Aux-)O-V-X (where Aux is not necessarily verbal)
- S-(Aux-)O-V-X as typologically unusual, found in West/Central Africa
- “The constituent order SOVX, relatively rare at world level, is relatively frequent among African languages.” (Creissels and König 2008:150)

Discussion: Comparative perspective

- Large amount of syntactic variation in languages with S-Aux-O-V-X word order; **S-Aux-O-V-X is not a uniform phenomenon** (Creissels 2005, 2018; Sande et al. 2019, a.o)
- ‘S-Aux-O-V-X’ in Tunen: preverbal O slot can take multiple objects; Aux not clearly from verbal source; syntax is otherwise consistently head-initial (Kerr to appear, in prep.)

Proposal for Tunen

- OV not synchronically conditioned by IS (although could have previously been due to an IS alternation)
 - OV in Tunen as language-internal recent innovation from VO base structure
- ⇒ binary distinction into IS-conditioned Benue-Congo OV/VO languages of the east versus stricter OV languages of the west (e.g. Güldemann 2007; Creissels 2018) does not capture Tunen's synchronic syntax

6. Conclusion

Summary

- OV word order in Tunen - specifically S-Aux-O-V-X - is found across IS contexts and is therefore the unmarked word order
- The preverbal object position is the general O position, not restricted by syntactic type of object, IS status of object, thematic type of object, definiteness/specificity of object, heaviness of object; OV found in main and embedded, affirmative and negative clauses
- Focus can be left unmarked; contrastive focus preferably expressed ex-situ in a biclausal reverse pseudocleft rather than in a monoclausal VO construction

Summary

- Tunen's clausal syntax can be captured in a formal model as a single innovation from the narrow Bantu pattern, compatible with (but not necessarily derived from) a historic stage in which this word order variation was triggered by IS
- Implications for OV in Tunen as recent language-internal innovation (vs areal pressure / inheritance from proto-language)

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All data unless otherwise stated from fieldwork conducted by Elisabeth J. Kerr in Mar-Jun 2019 and Nov 2021-Feb 2022 in Ndikiniméki and Yaoundé, Cameroon under MINRESI permits no. 90000061/MINRESI/B00/C00/C10/C12 and 000157/MINRESI/B00/C00/C10/C13 as part of the NWO Bantu Syntax and Information Structure project (BaSIS; 276-78-001; PI Jenneke van der Wal, Leiden University).

Maps plotted in R using language co-ordinates from Glottolog (Eberhard et al. 2022) and the lingtypology package (Moroz 2017).



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'VO' with secondary predication

- (14) Context: EO and PM are discussing the funeral of a local figure called Papa Daniel.

bá sɛ .. mukót ... mba a ka **híána** munen.

/bá sɛ́á .. mɔ-kóto ... mba a ka **híána**
SM.2 say .. 1-Bamileke ... but SM.1 PST3 become

mɔ-nəni/

1-Nen

'On dit que c'est un Bamileke, mais il est devenu un Munen.'

'They say he's a Bamileke, but he became a Munen.' [EO 1037]

'VO' with hesitation

(15) Context: PM is giving EO instructions for the QUIS map task.

PM: 'There is an intersection with three roads. On the first road-'

méndɔ **sinə** ... mɛnyama ɛ-káhɔ.

/mɛ-ndɔ **sinə** ... mɛ-nyama ɛ-kahɔ/

SM.1SG PRS see ... 9-animal

'Je vois ... une vache.'

'I see ... a cow.'

[EO 664]

'VO' with French

(16) PM: 'I myself saw the first vehicle he bought, it was Inyas who drove (it) -'

EO: 'I (also) saw (it)'.

- a ka **tiləkə** « Dieu hait les méchants ».

/a ka **tilə-aka** Dieu hait les

SM.1 PST3 write-DUR God.FR hates.FR the.FR

méchants/

wicked_people.FR

'- Il avait écrit « Dieu hait les méchants ».'

'- He wrote "God hates the wicked"'

[PM 1047]

'VO' if object in clause 1

- (17) Context: JO explains how to make the dish *kok*.

Με κα άκάν(α) (Ϸ) εμβόμ, με ná ηεκoke kéták, με ná nda híaná Ϸ
 Ϸmbél, με ná **tábónáka** tándζε tóbía με **ombokok**,

/με ka akana Ϸ ε-μβομα με na ηε-κoke

SM.1SG PST3 leave PREP 7-bush SM.1SG PST2 19-kok

ketaka με na nda hiana Ϸ Ϸ-mbela με

gather SM.1SG PST2 PROX enter PREP 3-house SM.1SG

na **tabonaka** t-andζε t-bia με **ombokoko**/

PST2 arrange 13-leaf 13-bad SM.1SG throw.REP

“Je suis partie en brousse, j’ai cueilli le *kok*, je suis revenue à la maison, j’ai arrangé les mauvaises feuilles, je les ai jété,”

“I went to the bush, I gathered *kok*, I returned home, I arranged the bad leaves, I threw them out,”

(JO 1339)