

X and XP Fronting in Verb-initial Word Order Derivation

Edith Aldridge
SUNY, Stony Brook

In this presentation, I propose analyses of word order derivation in two verb-initial ergative Austronesian languages: the Philippine language Tagalog and the Atayalic language Seediq, spoken in central Taiwan. Both languages exhibit V-Erg-Abs basic word order in monotransitive clauses. I argue, however, that word order generation in the two languages is actually quite different. First, I show that Seediq word order is best characterized as absolutive-final. If more material is added to a basic transitive clause, it generally appears between the verb and ergative DP but never follows the absolutive, yielding V-XP-DP_{Erg}-DP_{Abs} order. In Tagalog, on the other hand, additional material tends to follow the absolutive, yielding V-DP_{Erg}-DP_{Abs}-XP order. Additionally, hierarchical relations between the ergative and absolutive DPs are very different in the two languages. In Tagalog, the ergative nominal clearly c-commands the absolutive, while this is not the case in Seediq.

I propose that Seediq VOS word order results from movement of the absolutive DP to a topic position in the C domain and then fronting the remnant TP to the left of the absolutive. Evidence from clitic left dislocation and information structure provides support for topicalization of the absolutive. Predicate-fronting is indirectly supported by the inability of adjuncts to undergo focus movement outside of TP. This is expected given the predicate-fronting analysis of VOS word order generation. The adjunct is trapped inside the fronted TP; movement would result in a CED-type violation.

VSO word order in Tagalog, on the other hand, is generated by head movement of the verb to the left of the ergative and absolutive arguments. This accounts for the hierarchical relations. Since the absolutive and ergative nominals do not undergo movement but remain in their base positions, the ergative DP c-commands the absolutive throughout the derivation. Additionally, in contrast to Seediq, Tagalog adjuncts are able to undergo focus movement to the C domain. Again, this is expected, since no phrasal predicate-fronting takes place in Tagalog, leaving adjuncts free to move outside of TP.

Recent work in Minimalist syntax has proposed that there is no X^0 -level movement in syntax and that what appears to be head-movement is in fact remnant phrasal movement. In this talk, I consider the possibility that Tagalog VSO order is not generated by V-movement, as I have proposed, but rather by remnant VP-movement. However, I ultimately do not adopt the phrasal movement approach because of a crucial aspect of ergative syntax. In syntactically ergative languages, only absolutives are able to undergo A'-movement. In particular, a direct object is eligible to move in a transitive clause, when it absolutive status. But an oblique object in antipassive must remain inside the VP. Since the remnant VP-fronting analysis of VSO word order derivation would require dislodging both types of object from the VP, it is unclear how the asymmetry could be captured under a VP-fronting account.