Summary post on post-predicate goals (ALT July 2011)

Summary of responses to a query on post-predicate goals, posted on the ALT-Mailing list, 20.07.2011

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In my original query I had mentioned the lack of large-scale typological studies on this topic, comparable to work on direct object/verb ordering; Martin Haspelmath and Andrej Malchukov brought the following paper to my attention, which fills that gap:

Bernd Heine, Christa König
On the linear order of ditransitive objects
Language Sciences 32 (2010) 87–131

This is a great help, though it is restricted to the objects of ditransitive constructions, thus is somewhat narrower in scope to what I have been looking at (which includes local goals of verbs of motion).

A number of people reported that post-predicate goals are a common word-order pattern in their otherwise OV language (e.g. Pat Whitehead for Menya (A reference grammar of Menya, an Angan language of Papua New Guinea, available on the website of the Summer Institute of Linguistics). Pat Whitehead suggested that Goals were the favoured choice for post-predicate arguments in this language. I have also heard anecdotal remarks in a similar vein for Quechua, though they await confirmation.

Having taken a preliminary look at the responses, my initial feeling is that post-predicate goals in OV languages are what I would call a "wings-phenomenon": wings develop in different and unrelated species (buzzards, bats, bees, flying fish ...); despite the superficial similarities among winged creatures, the phylogenetic origins of wings can be quite distinct: what is shared is simply one particular solution to the problem of achieving mobility. I have identified the following five (probably conspiring) motivations for this construction:

1. iconic structuring of events
2. ease of processing
3. parallels between NP and VP structures
4. history
5. language contact

I doubt if any of them provides an explanation in their own right. In what follows, I acknowledge the contribution of the various people who responded in the relevant sections - I hope I haven't forgotten anyone.

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1. Iconic structuring of events

Frequent post-predicate positioning of Goals would appear to make sense from a cognitivist perspective: Clause-final position of Goals could be seen as an iconic reflection of Goals as the natural endpoints of events. That could be a factor counteracting the push towards "verb-finality" in OV languages. This is something that can probably only be meaningfully investigated through frequency counts on large text corpora, because the post-predicate goals are generally not grammaticalized in this position, but occur here more or less frequently.

2. Processing factors, Hawkins' (1994) Early Immediate Constituents etc.

The second issue where I would expect universal factors to be relevant is the interaction between the Goal's position with respect to the verb, and the type of flagging used. Hawkins' theory of Early Immediate Constituents (1994:96) suggests that (simplifying somewhat) verbal arguments that are postpositionally marked will be dispreferred after the verb, while prepositional arguments will be preferred in that position. This is actually relevant for Iranian, where postpositional Goals are indeed dispreferred after the verb, while others occupy that position fairly freely.

Larry Hyman drew my attention to a paper by Tatiana Nikitina dealing with post-predicate arguments in Mande:

"Categorial reanalysis and the origin of the S-O-V-X word order in Mande", To appear in Journal of African Languages and Linguistics (available at: http://www.projectwan.org/nikitina/papers.html).

In Mande, such post-predicate arguments (including Goals) are in fact postpositional, but crucially, Nikitina argues that they are not part of the VP (and would therefore not run counter to the expectations of Hawkins 1994).

3. Parallels between NP and VP structure

I had not considered this approach previously; thanks to Jan Rijkhoff and Tatiana Nikitina (via Larry Hyman) for suggesting this as a possible avenue - there are in fact some interesting possibilities here, given that the Iranian languages under consideration place NP-modifiers of all types after the N.

4. History

Post-predicate goals are present because they were a feature of the ancestor language (signature feature). Given the widespread nature of the construction in West Iranian, it would be obvious to look for a predecessor in the ancestor languages. Gilbert Lazard kindly provided the following reference, which I will follow up:

"Qu'est devenue la préposition ô ?" in E. Pirart & X. Tremblay, édd., Zarathustra entre l'Inde et l'Iran, Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2009.

This does not of course preclude any of the other factors, but it needs to be considered when assessing, for example, contact influence, the final factor I look at.

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5. Language contact

I have been harbouring a suspicion that some of what is found in West Iranian may be in part at least the result of (or reinforced by) contact with SVO languages of the region, in particular Neo-Aramaic. Don Stilo has been gathering data on contact influence across various parts of the grammars and lexica of the languages in the region for many years (e.g. Stilo 2005), and this topic can be seen within that larger context. The focus of my work is on Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic; contact influence has been going both ways between these two for centuries. Here very briefly is what I think may be going on:

Some of the (originally VO) Neo-Aramaic dialects[1] have actually become OV under contact influence. Khan (2008:324) notes for the Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of Urmi (west Iran): "The normal position for the placement of a direct object constituent is before the verb." But crucially, it retains post-verbal goals (cf. examples of recipients and addressees in Khan 2008:305). Thus in contact-induced word-order shift from proto-Aramaic VO to modern OV there seems to be a "lag": the goals remain in place, after the direct objects have switched sides of the verb, yielding the OVGoal order, rather than plain "verb final".

Conversely, languages with OV order seem to respond to contact with VO languages by shifting their Goals behind the predicate. In fact, none of the Iranian OV languages of the region has actually gone so far as a shift wholesale to VO; instead, they seem to get "stuck half way", putting most goals behind the verb, while leaving direct objects in preverbal position. So the originally OV and the originally VO languages appear to converge on a common OVGoal-order as compromise.

The complication is this: Neither the Kurdish dialects of the region, nor the OV-varieties of Neo-Aramaic, **obligatorily** place all goals after the predicate; rather, it is an option that is used to differing degrees with different types of goal - this is the aspect that I am currently working on.

The contact aspect was evident in several postings. Bill Palmer drew my attention to "Mono-Uruavan, a small group of aberrant Oceanic languages (which are usually verb-initial or SVO) which have become SOV due to contact with Papuan languages." Bill notes a "fair bit of variability in the placement of obliques", and he suspects that "there is a tendency for goals and perhaps some others to be postverbal. The only published study on word order in any of these languages is Fagan 1986 A grammatical analysis of Mono-Alu (Bougainville Straits, Solomon Islands) Canberra: Pacific Linguistics."
This is sounding very reminiscent of the Neo-Aramaic case (VO shifting to OV under contact pressure), so the parallels here are definitely worth following up.

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[1] The OV dialects belong to a dialect group referred to by Neo-Aramaicists as the "Trans-Zab Jewish New Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects".

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Sebastian Nordhoff notes for Sri Lankan Malay (now OV, originally VO) a tendency for local goals to go post-verbally, though not recipients or beneficiaries. This echoes a split I have found in Northern Kurdish (Armenia), where mostly only local goals (and the recipients of "give", provided they are without adposition) go postverbal, while addressees and benefactives are pre-verbal.

Another language that exhibits possible areal affects is Skou, a Papuan language from New Guinea (formerly Irian Jaya), geographically isolated from its closest relatives. Again, goals appear to be linked to the post-verbal position:
"...the only nominals that can appear in a postverbal position are goals and locations."
(quoted from p. 131 of Donohue, Mark. 2004. A grammar of the Skou language of New Guinea, online draft version: http://www.papuaweb.org/dlib/tema/bahasa/skou/Skoufull1.pdf
accessed 26.07.2011, thanks to Mark for directing me to this source).

Africa... there is a lot that is relevant to this topic here, too much for me to deal with at short notice. Contact effects in word order patterns is regularly mentioned; Larry Hyman sent me this reference, noting that Benue-Congo would be expected to be SVO, not SOV:
Güldemann, Tom. 2007b. Preverbal objects and information structure in Benue-Congo. In Aboh, Enoch O., Katharina Hartmann and Malte Zimmermann (eds.), Focus strategies in African languages: the interaction of focus and grammar in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic. Trends in Linguistics - Studies and Monographs 191. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 83-111.

Tom Güldemann mentioned work he has done on the placement of Addressees:
Güldemann, Tom. 2008c. Quotative indexes in African languages: a synchronic and diachronic survey. Empirical Approaches to Language Typology 34. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Niger-Congo clearly has some word-order variants which involve OV + some kind of post-predicate position (cf. Heine 1976). One that has been mentioned is the S-Aux-O-V-X order, especially in Mande (thanks to Larry Hyman and Mechthild Reh for pointing this out).
However, in the region I am concerned with, Aux is rather rare, and if present, is generally post-predicate (though there are some second-position "tense particles" that could arguably be analysed as "Aux", and further to the north, e.g. Armenian, mobile auxiliaries are common). An example from colloquial Persian with a (typically bare) post-predicate Goal and an Aux is the following:

(1) *raft-e*   *bud-am*   *jangal*
     go-PPP   AUX.PST-1SG   forest
     'I went to the forest'   (Roberts 2009:483)

6. Some illustrative data from West Iranian

I have put together a few examples of the kinds of construction I am referring to, all taken from West Iranian languages (goals in bold type). There are considerable areal differences in the way post-predicate goals are coded, and which kind of semantic goal can occupy the position - that is still work in progress:

Starting to the north we find languages with fairly consistent head-final ordering at all levels; here postpositional recipients are regularly pre-verbal, e.g. Māzandarāni, spoken near the Caspian coast (Borjian & Borjian 2008: 203, glosses added)

(2) *ruzi   haft   peštɛ, hašt   peštɛ vāš   geitɛmɛ   **gug vesse** yārdɛmɛ*
each.day 7   load 8   load fodder gather.impf.1s calf for bring.impf.1s
'Each day I would bring 7 or 8 loads of fodder for the calf'

However, even in this otherwise consistently head-final language, inanimate locational Goals are generally post-verbal. Don Stilo (p.c.) provided me with examples from running texts: he found around 32 examples of inanimate goals in texts; only two were preverbal. The majority of such postverbal goals lack any adposition:

(3) *mɛn o   ræjɛb-e   zena   burdɛmi   **vɛšune sɛre***
I   and   Rajab-POSS wife   go.PST.1P   3P:POSS house
'Mash Rajab's wife and I went to their house'

The pattern of bare, post-verbal, inanimate Goals is ubiquitous across the West Iranian languages:

PERSIAN
(=1) *raft-e   bud-am   **jangal***
go-ppp   aux.pst-1sg   forest
'I went to the forest'   (Roberts 2009:483)

(4) *agarna   pesar=e=rā   mi-sepord-am   **dast=e   amnie-hā***
otherwise boy=def=om   ipfv-turn.over.pres-1sg hand=ez gendarmerie-pl
'Otherwise I would have handed the boy over to the gendarmerie.' (Roberts 2009:140)

However, post-verbal Goals also regularly appear with adpositions; my impression is that this pattern increases southward towards the area of greatest Semitic influence (North Iraq), but this needs much more work. Likewise, the range of argument types tolerated in the post-verbal position increases to include Addressees. Recipients of 'give' verbs, on the other hand, seem to be regularly post-verbal throughout the region, suggesting an ancient pattern that has been retained.

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NORTHERN KURDISH (the Zakho-dialect, MacKenzie 1962:354))

(5) *rabî*   *dê*   *ê-n*   **bo**   **mal-ê**
     get.up:pst(3s)   so   come:subj-pl   to   house-obl
     '(He) got up so that they could come home'

(6) *kutilik-a dayk-a*   *xwa*   *kir*   **t**   **senik-a**   **xal-e**   **xwa-da**
     rissole-ez mother-ez   refl   put:pst(3s)   adp   tray-ez   uncle-ez   refl-adp
     (He) put his mother's rissole onto his uncle's tray'

VAFSI (Stilo 2005: 231, transcription and gloss slightly modified)

(7) *bæ-væsd*   **man**   **aw-e**
     punct-jumped(3sg)   middle   water-obl

GORANI (Mahmudweyssi et al, to appear, ex. 4:54)

(8) *ya guł-e*   *ī*   *bāxč-at-a*   *bi-ya*   **min**
     one   rose-ez   dempro   garden=2s=demclc   subj-give:pres   1s
     'Give me a rose of this garden of yours!'

DIALECT OF SIVAND (Le Coq 1979: 89, Sentence 16)

(9) *čāder-et-ā*   *be-de*   **ba**   **me**
     veil-2sclc-om(?)   subj-give:prs(2s)   to   me
     'give me your veil!'

Note that other obliques (non-Goals) are generally preverbal:
PERSIAN

(10) *ketābhā-yat=rā*   **az**   **ru-ye**   **miz**   *bardār*
     book-pl-2pclc=om   from   top-ez   table   take:imp
     'Take your books from the table! (Behzad & Divshali 1994:189)

NORTHERN KURDISH

(11) *Ya*   *tu*   *vê*   *qîz-a*   *xwe* **ji**   **gund**   *derîn-î [...]*.
     either   you   dem:obl   girl-ez   refl   from   village   throw.out-2s
     'either you take that girl of yours out of the village ...' (Mush1:66, own fieldwork, East
Anatolia)

GORANI (Mahmudweyssi et al, to appear, ex. 153)

(12) *bāyad*   *tu*   *bi-š-ī*   *āw*   **až**   **hānīk-aka**   *haw*   *bi-kar-ī*
     must   you   subj-go-2s   water from   spring-def   up   subj-do-2s
     'You must go and raise water from the spring'

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