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Jef Verschueren and Marcella Bertuccelli-Papi (eds.)

THE PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE
Selected papers from the 1985 International Pragmatics Conference

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1985 INTERNATIONAL PRAGMATICS CONFERENCE

edited by

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II 16 Ver 1.2

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA

1987

Deutsches Seminar I
Institut für Deutsche Sprache und Ältere Literatur
Universität Freiburg i. Br.

STABILITY AND CHANCE IN VN/NV ALTERNATING
LANGUAGES: A STUDY IN PRAGMATICS
AND LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY

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1. Introduction: Universals and typology

The Neogrammarian thesis of complete regularity in language change as a working principle meant that a language could be grasped as a diachronic whole and as a member of a wider system ('family') of 'genetically related' languages linked by formally statable rules. The late-20th century counterpart of the Neogrammarian project is unquestionably the search for similar links but synchronic ones, not between genetically related languages but pre-eminently among unrelated ones, that is, for what Greenberg has called 'implicational universals' (Greenberg 1966). Grammatical universals, however, depend crucially on a prior conception of grammar or syntax, and it is curious that some of the recent work in syntactic universals is based on assumptions about grammar which are identical with those of Greenberg's work of 20 years previously, as if the study of the relationship between clause structure and discourse, which has repeatedly shown itself to be of the greatest relevance for the study of typology, had never been undertaken. The outcome has been an impressively detailed yet purely algebraic re-arranging of Greenberg's universals with very little new insight into the fundamental nature, that is, the pragmatic basis, of linguistic universals and language typology.

The unfortunate consequence of this restriction is that 'syntax' (word order) is investigated as a system of forms isolated from pragmatic function on the one hand and from morphology and lexicon on the other. Funda-

mental as Greenberg's work is to linguistics in the latter half of the 20th century, it is, like all truly important work, a starting point rather than a finished product. Its significance lies not so much in its concrete achievements as in its novel universalistic attitude and its adumbration of new connections and new insights 'down the road'. If Greenberg's project is to be carried forward, it must be done through studies which are in one sense broader, in that they must encompass more than just 'word order', and in another sense narrower, in requiring a reversion to textual investigations of individual languages as a basis for typological reasoning.

2. The VSO/SVO/SOV typology: Some general remarks

Greenberg's (1966) tripartite division into Verb-initial, Verb-second, and Verb-final languages presented some immediate difficulties. Staal (1967), for example, claimed that Greenberg's universals were in fact only pseudo-universals. Almost every language one encountered presented exceptions to the set of implicational relationships. Lehmann (e.g., 1974, 1978) suggested that the Subject element should be omitted from the typology. His grounds for proposing this were that Subject was not a universally necessary component of sentences, and that the resulting dichotomy of VO and OV languages made it more possible to suggest higher level structural principles governing the two types. Hawkins (1983) supported such a dichotomy, and also questioned the typological relevance of the SV/VS contrast ("There are scarcely any other word orders or combinations which correlate with SVO at all, let alone uniquely [...] 115), and indeed of the relative ordering of S, O, and V as the basis for the word order typology.

Other researchers suggested that more, not fewer types were needed. For example, some languages had 'Free Word Order' (FWO). Derbyshire (1977) presented evidence that certain indigenous languages of the Amazon Basin are OVS. Keenan (1978) described a class of VOS languages. Curiously, however, for the most part discourse data was not adduced in support of these attributions.

An increasing need became apparent for criteria for determining 'basic' word orders. Despite Hawkins' optimism (1983: 12 *et pass.*), typological generalizations depend on a concept of basicness which is in fact often belied by intra-language variability. In Hopper (1971), the 'Free Word Order' languages were discussed, and it was suggested that it might be necessary to introduce a 'semantic' criterion into the definition of a basic word order type. The 'semantic' criterion proposed (Hopper 1971), which

was based on Prague School syntactic theory and influenced by the newly appearing work of Wallace Chafe (1970), can be worded as follows:

"The Basic Sentence Type in a language is that in which the Subject is old or topical, and the focus of new information falls on the Predicate".

Consequently, when analysing a FWO language, we might assign that language to a typological class depending on the word order in such a basic sentence type. This procedure would eliminate the need to set aside a special class of FWO languages, and would solve the problem of languages whose word order, while not "free", showed troublesome variation in such aspects as the position of the verb, especially in SV/VS sentence types. In Thompson 1978 a systematic division was made between languages with Grammatical word order, languages with Pragmatic word order, and languages with both Pragmatic and Grammatical word order, a typology which (correctly) omits the possibility of a language which would have neither. More recently, Brody (1984) has suggested that although individual languages may possess a "basic word order", the discourse function of this basic word order is not consistent from language to language, and may not correspond to any simple criterion such as textual frequency, ease of processing, lack of ambiguity, or the like.

The introduction of pragmatic questions into word order typology adds several complexities to an already intricate issue. For one thing, word order variation is itself a universal. No language has only one word order. "Free" word order is only an extreme case of variation found to a greater or lesser degree in all languages. Furthermore, there seem to be no reasons to value one word order typologically over another. Why should the supposedly 'neutral' distribution of new and old information implicit in the semantic principle have priority as a criterion of typological class membership? And finally, but by no means least troublesome, how were such sentence-level semantic concepts as 'new', 'old', and 'focus' to be standardized in such a way as to be useful cross-linguistically? These questions could only be answered by appealing to contexts that were far wider than that permitted by the use of isolated examples of 'possible' sentences, and required, as Brody has pointed out (Brody 1984), a language-by-language investigation of the relationship between pragmatics and the structural parameters being considered.

In my paper for the present symposium I will discuss several aspects of word order as it relates on the one hand to typology and on the other hand

to discourse and pragmatics. In the discussion that follows, the basic nature of the position of the verb with respect to other clause elements is reinstated, contra Hawkins 1983, on the grounds that the position of the verb appears to be a fundamental link between syntactic grammar and discourse function. Moreover, it seems most unlikely that such relatively minor syntactic facts such as prepositions vs. postpositions and preposed genitive vs. postposed genitive, which Hawkins proposes to substitute for Greenberg's verb position typology, would materially subtend more global facts about clause structure. The S,V,O typology is, however, re-examined in the light of the difficulties of defining S and O.

In this paper, too, I restrict myself to a discussion of VSO and SVO languages. The application of the ideas discussed to other types (both verb-final and more exotic types such as OVN and VOS) is part of another agenda. In line with a number of other researchers (e.g. Myhill 1985; Givón 1979) I assume that some of the difficult questions raised by these considerations (the problematic nature of 'SVO' languages, the insertion of semantic and pragmatic factors into the definition of typological class) should be best approached by adopting a more consciously diachronic attitude toward the data. I suggest (or rather, presuppose) that 'SVO' languages, while possibly not definable synchronically as a typological class, can be revealingly treated as a diachronic 'target', an extreme case of the shift towards NV to which languages of the V-initial type seem to be susceptible.

3. Grammatical/pragmatic concepts

The following grammatical/pragmatic concepts are important for the discussion which follows:

3.1 NV/VN alternation

In all NV languages there is an alternative order in which the subject follows the verb. This order may be very highly restricted; in English, for example, the initial verb is found chiefly in 'special' speech acts (questions, imperatives). It is also true, as noted by Greenberg, that no 'VN' language fails to have some construction in which the subject (or topic) can precede the verb. We might wish to capture these generalizations by stating that the division made by Greenberg between Type I and Type II languages consists not in fixed structural differences but in differences in the pragmatic circumstances under which in VO languages the Subject can precede the verb. Such a formulation, however, has the disadvantage of privileging the 'Ob-

ject', a category which is not only itself problematical, but which is present only in transitive sentences. Leaving open the question of whether there is a further 'true' linguistic type, we should distinguish then between verb-final (V#) languages and a type to be referred to as the VN/NV Alternating type (cf. Myhill 1985, discussed below). It is a type which is quite widely represented in the world's languages, and with appropriate individual changes, the account given below of Malay could stand for a number of languages; see Myhill (1985).

3.2 Subject

As indicated above, this term is used more for convenience than for precision. Greenberg's typology presupposes some sort of universal validity for the notions Subject, Verb, and Object; yet the first and the last are notoriously difficult to define (cf. Keenan (1976) and many others for 'Subject'; Plank (ed.) (1984) for the no less problematical concept of 'Object'). Moreover, Lehmann has insisted that 'Subject' has no value as a typological parameter. In what follows I shall suggest that the crucial parameters are Full Noun and Verbal, and that it is these two major elements which interact with clitics (see below) and pronouns in specific discourse circumstances to produce the variable typology which I am suggesting, and which interact crucially in typological shifts. In the following discussion, the alternation 'VS/SV' is therefore referred to as 'VN/NV', where N stands for either a fully lexical noun phrase or an autonomous (tonic, non-cliticized) pronoun.

3.3 Verb and clitic

The chief analytical problem involving the verb is the degree to which cliticized elements (enclitics and proclitics; particles, pronouns, temporal and modal adverbs, preverbs, and auxiliaries) are to be regarded as (morphologically) part of the verb or as autonomous. The work of several syntacticians (see Zwicky 1985 for discussion and references) suggests that a number of synchronic distinctions are possible among the various forms commonly classed as 'clitics'. I adopt here a somewhat reductionist terminology and refer to any pronoun-like element which (a) codes a discourse referent, and (b) is bound in any way (e.g., morphologically or accentually) to a verb, as a verbal clitic. In many languages it is possible to view a clause as being 'verb-initial' provided clitic pronouns are considered as part of the verb. (French is an obvious example of such a language). Briefly, the point to be made is that we are dealing in pragmatic terms with

the functional alternation between the patterns Noun — Verb and Verb — Noun, and that this pattern may include indicators of pronominal reference such as clitics, atonic pronouns, or pronominal affixes as part of the verb.

3.4 Transitivity

The theory of Transitivity which I shall assume here is the gradient theory developed by myself and Thompson (Hopper and Thompson 1980). In this view, Transitivity involves more than the simple presence or absence of an Object NP, but is a composite property, ultimately pragmatic in origin, depending on the co-presence of up to ten parameters. According to this hypothesis, the parameters of full Transitivity are:

1. Valency, presence of an agent and an object;
2. Kinesis, denoting an action or event;
3. Telic aspect, i.e. sense of a completed goal;
4. Punctuality, denoting a sudden action;
5. Volitionality, denoting a deliberate action;
6. Affirmation — an affirmative clause;
7. Modality — the clause is in the realis mode;
8. Agency — the agent is human or otherwise autonomous;
9. Object affectedness — the object is changed in some way;
10. Object individuation, i.e. definiteness-referentiality.

Transitivity is important in that the VN word order type can be shown to be MORE TRANSITIVE in this technical sense than the NV word order.

4. Malay

In early 19th century Malay texts assumed to be fairly close to vernacular Malay (specifically the Hikayat Abdullah [1848], cf. Abdullah 1932), we find the following clause types:

4.1 Clause types

<A> 'Preferred clause units' (Lambrecht 1985)

(i) Clitic [~]V Clusters:

di-bacha-nya-lah

<PASSIVE>-tr.verb-3p.AGENT-EVT

'he read (it)'

ku-bacha-lah

1p.AGENT-tr.verb-EVT

'I read (it)'

(Note: -lah is an "event" particle, enclitic to the verb, here and throughout glossed as EVT).

(ii) V[~]Noun:

datang-lah sa-orang orang muda

intr.verb-EVT[~]AGENT

= 'a young man came'

ku-bilang gajah itu

1p.AGT.-tr.verb[~]PATIENT

= 'I counted the elephants'

 Clauses with lexical agent and patient.

di-ambil/oleh pawang itu/sadikit batang pisang

PASS.-tr.verb[~]AGENT[~]PATIENT

'the elephant-magician (2)/took(1)a bit of banana stalk(3)' — ERGATIVE

monyet/men-dapat/bunga

AGENT[~]ME-tr.verb[~]PATIENT

'a monkey/gets hold of/a flower' — ACTIVE

aku/di-jualkan/oleh ibu-ku

PATIENT[~]PASSIVE-tr.verb[~]AGENT

'I/was sold/by my mother' — PASSIVE

These clause types represent three 'grammatical' constructions, which have been labelled ERGATIVE, PASSIVE, and ACTIVE (cf. Hopper 1983). Ignoring the morphology, we may note that these three transitive construction types are distributed between two basic word order patterns, corresponding to the NV/VN alternation:

(1) PASSIVE and ACTIVE have the order Noun-Verb

(2) ERGATIVE has the order Verb-Noun.

They correspond moreover to a clearly discernible distribution of discourse roles: the two transitive constructions with the order NV (i.e., PASSIVE and ACTIVE) may be said to background, i.e. to supply commentary, general or habitual actions, preparatory actions, and other discourse material which does not constitute the main points of the discourse; while the ERGATIVE 'foregrounds' in the sense of narrating events and stating

facts which are crucial to understanding the development of the discourse. To these may be added the intransitive type in which a noun — the subject/agent — follows the verb, as in the first clause under A (ii) above, and which also foregrounds.

Ergative and Passive share the same morphology. The third person agent *-nya* is enclitic to the transitive verb and is always accompanied by the prefix *di* on the verb; this prefix is glossed PASS. in the examples cited. First and second person agents are proclitic to the transitive verb. Ergative and Passive are thus formally quite similar. They differ most obviously, as discussed above, in word order, but besides the discourse functional difference between them (which might cause them to be interpreted linguistically simply in terms of word order), the Passive may and often does lack an Agent, while the Ergative never lacks an agent. The Patient of the Ergative, but not of the Passive, may be preceded by the preposition *akan*. There may, moreover, be some slight local grammatical differences in the ability of different arguments to control and to be the target of syntactic processes such as equi, reflexification, etc. The evidence for this is not strong, however, and there does not seem to be anything to be gained by starting out with a fixed inventory of 'constructions' and then showing their discourse 'correlates', any more, apparently, than one can start out with pre-linguistic 'discourse structures' and show their textual 'implementations'.

A more cogent distinction between Ergative and Passive has to do with composite Transitivity in the sense discussed above. The Ergative can be shown statistically over texts to be 'more Transitive' than the other two constructions by a considerable amount. The average Transitivity score for the Ergative, arrived at by counting for a sample of clauses of each type the number of Transitivity features for which the clause in question was plus (see Hopper 1983: 80), was 8.62, against 4.78 for the Active and 5.26 for the Passive. This distribution is consistent with the already noted "foregrounding" function of the Ergative and with our hypothesis about the ultimate relationship of Transitivity to discourse foregrounding in general (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 280-292).

The question now arises whether anything more specific can be said not merely about the relationship of ergativity to foregrounding and Transitivity, but about the specific form of the Malay ergative clause.

4.2 Preferred argument structure

The work of Jack DuBois (1985), and a creative extension of it by Knud Lambrecht (1985), suggest that the form and function of the Malay ergative clause is by no means unique. DuBois and Lambrecht note the heavy preponderance in actual speech of a small number of very simple clause types. Lambrecht refers to the statistically most common of these as the 'Preferred Clause Unit'. This unit consists of a Verb and at most one lexical Noun argument. It may also contain pronominal clitics, affixes, agreement markers, or even atonic pronouns, depending on the language, but actual texts will show clauses with more than one lexical noun to be virtually nonexistent.

The one overt argument, DuBois notes, is almost invariably an Absolute: a patient if the verb is transitive, an agent/subject if the verb is intransitive; this is DuBois' 'Preferred Argument Structure'. Ergativity is thus seen to be intimately related to discourse function. Intransitives typically present their noun as a new participant in the discourse; transitives report actions carried out by a thematic participant, and if in a transitive clause there is a new item, this is most commonly the patient. The Ergative case — always a non-zero allomorph — functions to indicate that a lexical noun is an agent and not, as is to be expected, a patient. As anyone who has studied texts in an ergative language knows, the ergative case on lexical nouns is pragmatically a rarity. Its non-zero allomorph is consistent with its marked discourse status.

Originally formulated on the basis of the Mayan languages of Central America, especially Sacapultec, DuBois' hypothesis about Preferred Argument Structure is strikingly confirmed by the Malay data.

4.3 Focus and aspect

In some earlier work (Hopper 1979c [1977]; 1979a), I described a common situation in texts, such that the distribution of focus in the clause and the "aspect" (perfective or imperfective) of the clause together constituted from the point of view of discourse a unitary property, functioning to foreground or background the clause. Narrative events implicated simultaneously a certain unmarked distribution of focus (thematicity of agent, newness of predicate) and the pragmatic sequencing — and hence completedness or perfectivity — of the events; while descriptive states, situations, and on-going repeated actions typically implicated a variety of newly introduced topics with a resulting focus on the subject/agent.

In 19th century Malay this distribution is a relatively clear one. The ergative, with its VN word order, is compatible with narrated events carried on by a single (thematic) topic/agent, while actives (transitive or intransitive) and passives, with their NV word order, are appropriate for "backgrounding" (global or local in the text) — situations, explanations, commentary, and so on. Actives and Passives, far from displaying continuity of agent/topic, tend to have new, short-lived, and somewhat random subjects. The following passage from the Hikayat Abdullah exemplifies these phenomena:

maka sa-bentar sa-bentar di-ambil-nya surat itu,
and from time to time PASS-take-AGT. letter the
di-renong-nya, kemudian di-letakkan-nya, demikian-lah
PASS.-stare:at-AGT. then PASS.-put:down-AGT such -LAH
laku-nya. Maka sa-hari-hari adat-nya ia berkereta pada
behavior his and daily habit his he go:driving on
petang-petang; maka pada hari itu sampai malam kereta
afternoon and on day that until evening carriage
menanti di-pintu, tiada ia mau turun dari rumah-nya...
ME:remain at-door not he want go:down from house-his

'and this was his behavior: every now and then he took the letter, stared at it, and then put it down again. It was his custom to go for a drive every day in the afternoon; but on that day his carriage remained at the gate, and he did not leave his house' A 86.

At a somewhat later stage of Malay (Rafferty 1985), we see the beginnings of a shift in this distribution, as, increasingly, transitive clauses are formulated in the active regardless of their discourse status. In the modern language the tendency toward a clause type of the NV form has proceeded even farther, so that if asked to translate (!) a clause with a pronominal agent, with no content supplied, modern speakers will spontaneously produce clauses modelled on the NV type, such as:

dia memukul anjing itu
he ME:beat dog the
'He beats the dog'.

This development has proceeded by way of an encroachment of the two NV clause types — Passive and Active — onto the discourse-pragmatic

territory of the Ergative (VN). Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the average Transitivity of the NV type increases, that is to say, the discourse role of the older Ergative is assumed by the Active and Passive constructions.

The stabilization of NV word order has gone considerably further in Indonesian than in Malay. In the historical development of Malay into Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), there has been a strong influence on the written language from Dutch speaking and 'Indo-European' users (i.e., those of mixed Dutch-Indonesian descent). The written language was crucial in the development of the modern standard, both written and spoken. The discourse distribution of foregrounding and backgrounding, and the narrative use of the 'passive' (i.e., ergative), had no counterparts in Dutch, and even 'native' speakers of Malay, if they were not ethnic Malays, appear to have extended and regularized the NV clause type for both lexical noun and pronoun clause topics.

Nonetheless, spontaneous spoken Malay has to some extent retained the distribution described here for the early written documents. Foregrounded, urgently reported events which conform to the older Verb-(Noun) template (i.e., the Preferred Clause Unit) are to be found, as in the following passage from the Malay conversations in Brown 1956:

Ish, getek sangat teman menengok-nya.
EXLM mad very I ME:see him
Chuba tengok, sudah di-langgar-nya pula gelok itu.
just look ASP. PASS.knock:over AGT now pot the
Lantai tidak berlubang, berselelir-lah ayer itu karang.
floor not have:holes spread:out EVT water the now
Mun di-turutkan hati, entah-lah budak ini.
let PASS.follow "heart" not:know EVT boy this

'It makes me mad to watch him. Look there, he's knocked over the pot again. The floor has no drainage and now the water's spreading all over. Let him do as he pleases and I don't know where this boy will end up'. (p.72)

In such passages, we can still observe the ergative/absolute distribution of the post-verbal lexical nouns in foregrounding, such that these nouns are consistently absolute (i.e., patient of transitive/agent of intransitive) exactly as described by Du Bois:

sudah di-langgar-nya pula gelok itu
 'he has knocked over the pot again'.

berselelir-lah ayer itu
 'the water is spreading'.

On the other hand, the text also contains lexical nouns in pre-predicate position:

Lantai tidak berlubang
 floor not have:holes
 'the floor has no drainage-holes'.

Such backgrounded utterances, which explain or comment on the discourse, are consistently NV in form and, to the extent that case marking is visible, are nominative/accusative. For example, the third person agentive pronoun is *dia* for both transitive and intransitive clauses, while the verb-initial — i.e., ergative/absolutive — clause type has the enclitic *nya* for transitive agent and *dia* for intransitive 'subject' and transitive object.

Yet 'backgrounded' though they are, they constitute a considerable percentage of all occurring clauses. For example, if there is a focus on the agent, the clause is predictably NV, even though there is no clear sense in which such clauses are 'backgrounded':

Long, kamu menumbok, ya?, aku mengayak
 NAME you ME:pound OK? I ME:sieve
 'Long, you pound [the clay], OK? I'll sieve [it]' (66)

There are, admittedly very rarely, examples of NV clauses in which both S and O are lexical nouns. One clear example is the following (in which antecedent discourse is given in English). It is an interrogation of a witness whose testimony implicates the defendant Botak in the murder of Mat Hassan; the witness's replies therefore tend to focus on the proper names:

A. (...Mat Hassan arrived). B: (Did he come in?) A: (No, he stayed outside). A: (Then?) B: (Botak asked, 'What brings you here, Mat Hassan?') A: (What did Mat Hassan say?) B: (He said he had come to get a stick.)

B (continuing): *Botak ambil tongkat lalu dia terjun ka-tanah,*
 NAME take club then he jump to-ground

kata-nya, 'Ambil-lah, Mat Hassan, tongkat-mu!' serta dia
 saying take EVT (NAME) club your same-time he

katok Mat Hassan.
 hit (NAME)

'Botak then picked up a club and jumped down onto the ground, saying 'There's your stick, Mat Hassan!' and as he said that he hit Mat Hassan'. (173)

In comparable discourse contexts in Abdullah's writings these word orders would be impossible without some overt 'dislocator'. The older way of narrating such events would be something like the following (I will use, somewhat incongruously perhaps, the same lexicon):

Maka oleh Botak pun di-ambil-nya tongkat, lalu terjun-lah
 then by NAME PUN PASS.-take-AGT club then fall-EVT
ia ka-tanah...maka di-katok-nya Mat Hassan.
 he to-ground then PASS.-hit-AGT NAME

'Then Botak picked up a club and jumped down to the ground...and he hit Mat Hassan'.

We have no real way of knowing exactly how close Abdullah's prose was to the spoken language of his time. But evidently we have in the modern period the possibility of unconditional NV word order, that is, NV word order not rigidly restricted to backgrounded contexts. 'Unconditional' should not, however, be taken in an absolute sense. There is presumably still *some* conditioning factor at work here. In the above dialog, for example, there are two discourse topics (Mat Hassan and Botak) which are the sole competitors for reference, and hence alternate focus on the one and the other. Proper names, too, have some special discourse properties which have yet to be fully described (see Lambrecht 1985). Furthermore, the context is a legal one in which identification of the participants is as important as relating their actions. The Active Prefix *me-* is dropped in this sort of lively narration, so that the morphological trappings which are normally felt to accompany the NV word order now assume other functions (see Wallace 1982 for one development of this semantically complex morpheme). It goes without saying that we have here a familiar diachronic situation: a structure which was once a secondary marker (viz. the *meng-* prefix) develops an autonomous function when the concomitant primary marker (viz. the word order difference) is neutralized.

4.4 Morphological correlates of the VN-to-NV shift?

We might expect that when word order shifts from VN to NV, a concomitant shift from ergativity to accusativity will also begin to manifest itself. Since the vast majority of NV clauses are intransitive, such a shift is not obvious. However, examples like the one cited above:

Botak ambil tongkat
'Botak took a club'.

show the expected distribution: transitive agents have no special form in NV clauses. In the rare cases in which lexical nouns occupy both arguments in a 'VN' clause, ergativity is found:

Si-Manap mengurupkan ringgit pada Si-Amin, sudah lima enam
NAME ME:change dollar with NAME ago five six
hari. Olah-nya baharu tadi di-penting dek
day. apparently only just:NOW PASS.:test AGNTV
Si-Amin-nya ringgit itu.
NAME-DEF.dollar the

'Manap changed a dollar for Amin five or six days ago. Apparently Amin only tested the dollar just now'. (110)

The nucleus of the last clause: *de-penting dek Si-Amin-nya ringgit itu*, is ergative. Its agent has the agentive preposition *dek*, the dialectal equivalent of the literary *oleh*; it has the word order V-Agent-Patient ('VN'); and the verb has the 3rd person passive/ergative prefix *di*. With (clitic) pronouns ergativity can also be shown to be present in 3rd person clauses, e.g. for transitive agent:

sudah di-langgar-nya gelok itu
ASP. PASS.-knock:over-AGT. pot the
'He's knocked over the pot' (72)

With 1st/2nd person agents the earlier language permitted VN order with the non-clitic pronouns, e.g.

pulang-lah aku
go:home-EVT I
'I returned home' (Hikayat Abdullah 88)

The modern texts show no examples at all of this pattern, suggesting that in the modern colloquial language ergativity is restricted to 3rd person agents.

both lexical and pronominal (clitic), and even here is found only in special discourse contexts. It is tempting to relate the two phenomena: if the broad generalization that Ergative languages are verb-peripheral (either verb-initial or verb-final) is valid, as it seems to be, it would seem to follow that ergative case marking should fall away and be replaced by accusative case-marking as NV word order establishes itself.

It is unfortunate that Ergativity has so rarely been studied from a discourse perspective. There are many facts in individual ergative languages which suggest that discourse-based investigation would be rewarding. In Abkhaz, for example, certain of the subject prefixes on the verb are dropped if the subject immediately precedes the verb (Deeters 1963: 58-9; Boeder 1979: 474). The recurrent relationship between ergative morphosyntax and 'definiteness' in a variety of languages calls for greater attention to trans-sentential approaches to the phenomenon as a whole; cf. Hopper 1979b, Du bois 1985. It is in any case unlikely that the study of individual sentences in isolation from their contexts (the program implicit in many 'passive-to-ergative' investigations) will explain shifts in ergative case marking. In Malay there seems to be a clear discourse motivation for the decay of ergativity, as will be discussed below. When examined from a discourse perspective, Malay presents an example of a language in which ergativity is 'split' along discourse lines, foregrounding being accomplished by ergative-absolutive case marking, backgrounding by nominative-accusative. Given the tendency just mentioned for ergative languages to be either VS or OV, we might predict that if a language splits ergativity along discourse lines, and if this split implicates a word order split also, the ergative side of the split will always be accompanied by the verb-peripheral word order and the accusative side by SV word order, but never the other way round. The diachronic generalization of the preceding paragraph would appear to follow logically from this.

A second phenomenon which has to do with possible morphological correlates of the shift toward NV word order involves the notion of CATEGORIALITY developed in Hopper and Thompson 1984. According to this theory, the lexical categories NOUN and VERB are not *a priori* grammatically fixed, but are discourse-constituted instantiations of prototypical functions. For verbs, this function is to report a now event of the discourse. To the degree that a linguistic form is carrying out that function, it will reflect the grammatical characteristics (morphological and syntactic) of a verb in that language. For nouns, the prototypical discourse function is to

identify a new participant of the discourse. Forms which carry out this function are predicted to be accompanied by whatever morphosyntax grammatically characterizes nouns. Linguistic forms which fall away from these prime functions will tend to lack morphosyntactic markings characteristic of the two prime categories.

There are some indications that the verb which carries the *meng*-prefix (i.e., the Active), which almost invariably is preceded by its subject, is in some sense 'less of' a verb than the Ergative *di*-form (whose order is, of course, verb-initial, i.e., VN). Verbs which carry the prefix *meng*- often have the same distribution as nouns, that is, are nominalized verbs; they may be objects, subject/topics, etc., and may have the demonstrative *itu*:

Sa-bermula maka ada-lah kira-kira delapan sembilan bulan
 now and it:was about eight nine months
aku bertekun mengaji dan menulis itu.... Maka ada-lah waktu
 I occupied ME:study and ME:write the and it:was time
tengah hari lepas-lepas mengaji itu...
 mid day after ME:study the

'Now it happened that for about eight or nine months I was occupied with studying and writing... And at about midday, after studying was over...' (20)

In an important paper, John Myhill has recently shown (Myhill 1985) that the SV/VS alternation is a typological continuum. (Previous work has not really made this claim, since it has on the whole not attempted to find truly typological correlates of the SV/VS continuum.) Languages which are truly VS, i.e. which are at one extreme on the gradient, permit an NP to the left of the verb only if the verb is in a nominalized form. The implementation of the VS to SV shift, Myhill suggests, is characterized by a progressive verbalization of the verb in SV clauses, both typologically and diachronically.

Myhill's work can be combined with the Categoriality Hypothesis (Hopper and Thompson 1984) to point to the conclusion that as a language moves from VN and increasingly accepts NV as an unmarked word order, we can expect to find:

- (1) that NV clauses INCREASE IN TRANSITIVITY, and
- (2) that the V in NV clauses INCREASES IN VERB CATEGORIALITY.

An increase in Transitivity could be brought about in one of two ways: by dropping constraints against transitive marking in NV clauses, or by loss of transitivity morphology peculiar to VN clauses. Since ergative morphosyntax is often overtly transitive, the latter could quite easily involve loss of ergativity.

Similarly, an increase in 'verb categoriality' could likewise be manifested either as a loss of constraints against certain typically verbal morphemes in NV clauses, or the converse: the loss of such morphemes in VN clauses.

A further implication, and one which I will not pursue here, is that more research may uncover some quite specific typological properties characteristic of 'SVO' languages as a class. We may not have heard the last of the Greenberg tripartite division. I would, however, expect these correlates, if they are found, to be negative rather than positive ones.

4.5 *Verb and noun orientation*

In Hopper 1983, I noted that the discourse functions of the VN (ergative) and NV (Passive and Active) constructions in Malay could be seen as involving two different kinds of discourse orientation: *Verb-initial* (VN) is oriented toward the verb and, functionally, the actions of the discourse. *Verb-initial* narrates actions in which participants are involved. *Noun-initial*, i.e. NV, clauses are noun-oriented. They *make predications about* things and participants in the discourse; how they are disposed, what they did, why they are there, and so on. *Verb-initial* clauses *narrate*, *noun-initial* clauses *describe*. *Verb-initial* clauses are reportorial, *noun-initial* clauses are predicative.

4.6 *A diachronic comment on 'Stable NV Languages'*

At some state in the histories of languages which have undergone the full shift from VN/NV to (stable) NV, a re-analysis must have taken place, apparently along the following lines. The locus of diffusion for the merger of the two types must lie in a potential ambiguity between *describing an action* and *narrating or reporting an event*, different speech acts might be equally appropriate on a given occasion, and which might easily be understood differently by speaker and hearer, *especially if they are of different cultures*. Only in a mythical social reality which is totally shared and in which intersubjectivity is complete could this distinction be categorically sustained; in the case where social cohesiveness is subverted from without, misunderstanding would be the rule rather than the exception. It is perhaps

no coincidence that Indonesian and Modern English, two languages in which a distinctly 'SVO' syntax has emerged, as opposed to an alternating syntax of the VN/NV variety, have creolization in their histories. It seems reasonable to suppose that the sorts of conditions of social discontinuity typical of the colonial situation might be especially conducive to the shift from VN/NV Alternating syntax in the direction of stable SVO word order. Discourse across the two cultures would be fragmentary and peremptory; it would lack the intimacy and familiarity of even a highly stratified homogeneous society. Thus communication would have to be more explicit and less reliant on context, and a greater proportion of nouns to verbs would occur. The subtleties of contextual conditioning of word order would become irrelevant and an increasing proportion of utterances would be formulated predicatively. These factors would all favor NV utterances and lead eventually to a situation in which the proportion of NV clauses in discourse overwhelmed the receding VN type in all but a few specialized kinds of speech acts.

I conclude this study with a note on the Early Germanic languages. This note is intended only to draw attention to some typological-diachronic similarities between Malay and Early Germanic, not to be an exhaustive study of word order change in Germanic. A full investigation of the implications of Preferred Argument Structure and of the Transitivity Hypothesis for Early Germanic syntax is a desideratum.

5. Early Germanic

Germanic is perhaps the best-studied of all language groups in which the NV/VN alternation is manifested (for references to a considerable body of earlier literature, and discussion, see Hopper 1975 [1967]).

In Old Norse the alternation of NV and VN displays close functional parallels to Malay: Lively narration, i.e. foregrounding, implicates VN, backgrounding — both local and global — is accomplished strictly with NV; these are Heusler's 'bewegte Stellung' and 'Ruhstellung' respectively (Heusler 1921: 173-182). It is especially interesting to note that, according to Heusler, Old Norse is governed by an 'iron rule' (das eiserne Gesetz) of word order: the Verb may not be more than one full sentence element away from the beginning of the clause. This sentence element may be a subject or an object/complement, e.g.

sá Áss, er Loki heitir
'that god who was called Loki'.

However, if there is a second full noun, the verb may not be last, e.g. **sá Áss Loki heitir*, would be impossible. Although anything other than a subject could only precede the verb in a subordinate clause, this suggests that the crucial parameter is indeed Full Noun/Verb, rather than Subject/Verb.

Koma þeir at kveldi til eins bónda ok fá þar
came they at evening to a farmer's [house] and made there

náttstað. En um kveldit tók Þórr hafra sína ok skar
nightplace and on that-evening took Thor goats his and slew

báða. Eptir þat váru þeir flegnir ok bornir
both after that were they skinned and put

til ketils. ... Þórr bauð til matar með sér bóndanum ok konu
in pot Thorinvited to meal with him farmer and wife

hans ok börnum þeira; sónr bónda hét
his and children their son of-farmer was-named

Þjálfi, en Róskva dóttir.
Thjalf and Roskva daughter

'Toward evening they came to a farmer's house, and made their camp there. And that evening Thor took his goats and slaughtered them. After that they were skinned and put in the pot. ... Thor had invited the farmer and his wife and their children to eat with him. The farmer's son was called Thjalfi and his daughter Roskva'. (Gordon 1957: 8)

A recurrent aspect of the word order is the 'pluperfect' use of the NV word order, as in the clause beginning "*þórr bauð...*". The backgrounded word order in such cases is an indication that an antecedent event is being related which is not actually part of the narrative but is being presented as a prerequisite to understanding the events of the narrative themselves. If allowance is made for this kind of manipulative use of backgrounding, and for a purely stylistic alternation of NV/VN in narrative, the general picture which emerges is of VN for foregrounding and NV for backgrounding.

In Old English prose an original pattern existed in which narrative foregrounding was carried on by an episode-initial *tha*+VN clause followed in the same episode by a cluster of OV clauses (symbolized here by V§); this pattern alternated in turn with a Backgrounding pattern in which a subject/agent preceded the verb; cf. Hopper 1979a: 220-226. The statistics of the different degrees of punctuality in verb-peripheral (VN/V#) clauses

and verb-medial (NV) clauses reported there show a distribution which can easily be interpreted in terms of the Transitivity Hypothesis: the VN/V# clusters are more Transitive than the NV clauses. Verb-final clauses, however, do not appear to form a discourse-functional class in Old English. They include both episode-internal clauses, which are locally foregrounded, and subordinate clauses, which are locally backgrounded. High transitivity is therefore associated with (1) VN clauses, and (2) verb-final clauses functionally associated with VN clauses.

Old English, and by implication the early Germanic languages in general, is then peculiar in displaying in addition to the VN/NV alternation, a verb-final clause type, associated functionally, as we have seen, with both episode-internal foregrounding and with subordination. This situation is consistent with a historical 'drift' away from SOV word order (Hopper 1975). Narrative prose in Old English (with a date of perhaps as early as 800 AD for the older parts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) and Old Norse (1200-1400 AD) makes for an interesting comparison. It seems safe to conclude that Old Norse, like English of the later period, has lost all but a few relics of the OV clause type; in Old Norse these relics (cf. Heusler 176-7) are, interestingly, found in subordinate clauses, e.g.

marger aþrer, er upp tǫlþo harma sina
'many others who recounted their sufferings'

þeir tǫlþo upp harma sina
'they recounted their sufferings'

(where the contrast *upp tǫlþo* (particle+verb)/*tǫlþo upp* (verb+particle) 'recounted' points to postponing of the verb in a subordinate clause).

Evidence for the archaic nature of verb-final clauses may be found in Old Swedish legal language, in which internal clauses occur with final verbs while the initial (topical) clause has VN:

farr annar broþer köpferþum ok annar hemæ i asku sitær, þapir eighu þer iammykit af arvi

'If one brother goes off on a commercial venture and the other stays at home by the hearth, both shall have an equal share of the inheritance'. (cf. Hopper 1975: 51).

A little further afield, in Gothic, one can also see evidence of postponement of the verb in subordinate clauses;

saei inn ni atgaggiþ

'who does not enter in' (Greek ó μη εἰσερχόμενος)

(cf. Hopper 1975: 42, discussing Delbrueck). With such widely scattered attestations we are entitled to attribute the possibility of SOV word order at least in subordinate clauses to Proto-Germanic, and to regard the attestations themselves as relics of a once stronger pattern.

The loss of the 'SOV' clause type leaves Old Norse with the same alternation of VN/NV described for Malay, having a closely similar discourse-functional distribution of the two types. However, there is some evidence for a more basic role for Verb-initial clauses in Nordic than in 'West Germanic'. In West Germanic (i.e., Old English, Old Saxon, and Old High German), truly verb-initial clauses are restricted to epic poetry; more frequent is what Delbrueck referred to as 'gedeckte Anfangsstellung', initial position 'covered' by a particle (such as *þá*) or adverbial.

In Old Norse narrative prose, just as in Malay, VN clauses are typically dynamic and event-oriented, while NV clauses tend to be durative, stative, or backgrounding and descriptive. Although it is very common for VN clauses to be introduced by *þá*, this is by no means essential, and verbs in absolute initial position are common:

Lét hann þar eptir hafra ok byraði fer ina austr í Jotunheima ok alt til hafsins, ok þá fór hann út yfir hafit þat it djúpa.

'He left the goats behind, and began the journey east to Jotunheim and right into the sea, and then he traveled out over the deep ocean'. (Gordon 1957: 9)

Moreover, frozen legal phrases in Old Swedish (Nordic) commonly have true initial verbs:

sva skal vittni bæra: Bær iak þæs vittni.

This is how one bears witness: 'I bear witness thereto'.

The picture we have of Old Norse, then, is of a language with slight relics of V# word order in truly subordinated clauses, and a discourse-conditioned alternation of VN/NV.

NOTE

* I would like to acknowledge financial assistance from the American Council of Learned Societies, and from the Provost for Graduate Studies and Research at the State University of New York, Binghamton, which made it possible for me to attend the Pragmatics Conference in Viareggio.

CONVERSATIONAL RELEVANCE

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The conclusion I shall argue for in this paper is that there is not just one central question about the analysis of relevance to be discussed, but rather a number of questions each of which raises far more issues than one could hope to discuss in a single paper. Amongst these questions are the following:

- 1) Questions which raise issues about the evidential relevance of a proposition. For instance, if there is an argument the question arises of how what is said is related to positions being maintained. Is it intended to support the speaker's position, or to undermine his opponents?
- 2) Questions which raise issues about the determination of illocutionary force. For instance, what material in the conversational-context is available to participants to determine the responses expected of them at any given stage of the exchange?
- 3) Questions which raise issues about the interpretation of an utterance in a conversational context. For instance, what material is in principle relevant to the interpretation of an utterance in a specific context? Some have argued, of course, that this last question is profitless, since the answer is 'Everything', and you cannot have a theory about everything. (Fodor & Katz 1974). But this pessimistic conclusion seems unwarranted if this admittedly large and unmanageable question is itself split up into a number of more manageable ones. For example, what is relevant to the resolution of ellipsis? What is relevant to the determination of a reference for a pronoun, or a definite NP? What parts of shared background knowledge are relevant?