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Salinan Word Order

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My purpose here is to report on a small study of word order in Salinan, an extinct Hokan language of California, as reflected in texts in Mason (1918). The texts examined take up about 52 pages, including interlinear glosses and free translations. This study is based on a very superficial understanding of the language, and my assumptions about the structure of sentences is generally based on a relatively uncritical acceptance of Mason's interlinear glosses. It is not unlikely that I have misanalysed some of the clauses. For these reasons, the conclusions of this paper should be taken as rather tentative. Salinan word order is rather interesting theoretically, however, in that it presents a rather clear case of one type of problem for classifying languages by the familiar typology of SVO, SOV, VSO, and so on.

Mason's texts come from speakers of two dialects, San Antonio and San Miguel. The San Antonio texts fall into a number of different categories. Some are texts that were translations into Salinan of myths collected from speakers of other California languages. I ignored these texts. Some of the texts examined were collected in Spanish from a native speaker of Salinan who Mason describes (p. 4) as an "unsatisfactory linguistic informant", and later translated into Salinan by other native speakers. The word order in these texts might be coloured by Spanish, so the statistics cited below will consistently distinguish these texts from the other texts. Also kept distinct in the counts below are two texts (pp. 92-93) which were told by one speaker and then revised by another. Although it is not clear that the order in these latter texts should be coloured, the frequencies are clearly different from the other texts, so they are treated like the translated texts. I will refer to these two classes of texts, those that are translations from Spanish and those that were revised, as the indirect texts. There are 17 pages of indirect texts in the San Antonio dialect. My impression is that the order in the translated texts has been somewhat coloured by Spanish word order, since the word order in these texts seems to be intermediate between that exhibited in the other texts and Spanish word order. Nevertheless, in so far as the order in the indirect texts (both the translated ones and the revised ones) is similar to that in the direct texts, they constitute a useful source of data.

The remaining texts were collected directly from native speakers. These texts will be referred to as the direct texts. I assume that the direct texts provide a reliable source of data, although legitimate questions about representativeness

might arise. There are 19 pages of direct texts in the San Antonio dialect. The San Miguel texts, taking up 16 pages, are all direct.

As is typical for most texts, clauses containing a nominal subject and a nominal object do not occur frequently. In the 52 pages of texts and translations, I identified 21 such clauses. I excluded clauses whose structure was obscure to me, and clauses in which the object was a clause or quotation, since the word order in such clauses often varies from that in clauses with a simple nominal object. The frequency of the different types in the two types of texts was as follows:

(1)	Direct		Indirect		Direct	
	San Antonio		San Antonio		San Miguel	
SVO	2		11		4	17
VSO	0		0		2	2
VOS	0		1		0	1
SOV	1		0		0	1

The number of such clauses in the direct texts is too small to draw firm conclusions, but the fact that 6 out of the 9 clauses with a nominal subject and a nominal object are SVO suggests that SVO might be the dominant order. The fact that this order is reflected in most of the clauses in the direct texts further supports this, though the possible influence of Spanish on the order in the indirect texts should not be discounted. Turner (1987) describes the unmarked word order as VOS, based apparently on example sentences in Harrington's notes. Although it is possible that the unmarked order was VOS and that the higher frequency of SVO order in Mason's texts was due to the influence of Spanish, it is puzzling that there is only one example of VOS order in Mason's texts, and none in the direct texts. I will leave this puzzle unresolved, and continue to assume that Mason's texts provide the best available evidence for Salinan word order, deficient though it may be.

Turner describes Salinan word order as free. The existence of the four orders in Mason's texts shows that this is true, even if SVO is dominant. Examples with each of the four orders attested are given in (2) to (5). The examples are given in the transcriptions used by Mason; the morphological analyses are partial, tentative, and my own, except for a number of corrections offered by Katherine Turner. I remain responsible for any remaining errors.

- (2) pe-ma't' se-p-astc'ene''e-ko-tén
 art-beast again-act-beg-3sg,obj-plur(iterative)
 be-k'e'ncanIL ... (SVO)
 art-God
 The beast also begged God ... (p. 77)

- (3) ʔa'me-p-eten-eʔ-ó' o'ape·'u' la'pai ʔit'e'ni', ...
 then-act-shot-plur-3,obj brother three arrow (VSO)
 Then her brother shot three arrows, ... (p. 119)
- (4) tax pe-xo'tc pe-ʔa·'muL p'-k'e'poʔ'a'-u. (SOV)
 and art-dog art-puma act-followed-3sg,obj
 And the dog followed the puma. (p. 95)
- (5) ra'm-peta'a-ko ʔ'a'a'u be-ko'l' tept'o''on-ko
 then-made-3sg,obj fire art-hare burn-3sg,obj
 be-lk'a'. (VOS)
 art-coyote
 Then Hare made a fire to burn Coyote. (p. 87)

Further examination of the texts, however, suggests that classifying Salinan as an SVO language, even as a flexible SVO language, would be misleading. Although clauses with a nominal subject and nominal object are not frequent in the texts, clauses with a nominal subject or a nominal object are much more common. Examination of the first 5 texts, a subset of the direct San Antonio texts, reveals the following count for clauses containing a nominal object, whether or not there was a nominal subject or not:

- (6) VO 32
 OV 0

Two of these 32 VO clauses contain a nominal subject and are SVO; the remaining 30 clauses are ones whose subject is either understood in the context, as in (7), or in an apparent infinitival control structure, as in (8).

- (7) ra'm-hala' umck'a^u,yu
 then-used talons
 Then he used his talons. (p. 62)
- (8) ram·-ale·'nta'iyax ʔe-no·'nanax pe-ʔ'a·xa·'yux-ten
 then-remembered sub-collect art-bear-plur
 Then he remembered to collect the bears. (p. 62)

Although the remaining texts contain sporadic instances of apparent OV clauses (such as the SOV sentence in (4) above), they are overwhelming VO, so there is little question that we can classify Salinan as VO.

Given the frequency of SVO order among clauses with a nominal subject and a nominal object, the counts for clauses containing a nominal subject, regardless of whether there was a nominal object, are more surprising:

(9)	Direct	Indirect	Direct	
	San Antonio	San Antonio	San Miguel	Total
SV	8	27	7	42
VS	43	48	67	158

The direct texts exhibit a considerably higher frequency of VS order compared to SV. VS is also more frequent in the indirect texts, though the ratio is considerably less; this difference may reflect the influence of Spanish. The data in (9) would suggest that Salinan was a typical VS language; SV order is often a common marked order in verb-initial languages. But the higher frequency of VS order is surprising, given the preponderance of SVO order among sentences containing a nominal object. The figures in (9) include such sentences, as well as intransitive clauses, transitive clauses in which the object is understood in the context or expressed by a suffix on the verb, as in (10), and clauses in which the object is clausal or infinitival, as in (11). (However clauses in which the object is a direct quotation are excluded.)

- (10) a'm-pama.t'-ko pe-t-i.'itc-o.
 then-chased-3sg,obj art-noun-dog-3sg,poss
 Then his dog chased him. (p. 95)

- (11) be-ta''muL ram-ko'-p'iem.-o ti-tá.m tip'ha'to
 art-puma then-neg-know-3sg,obj sub-house dung
 pa.'ka.
 cow
 The puma did not know that the cow dung was a house. (p. 69)

When the figures in (9) are further broken down according to whether the clause is transitive or intransitive, a striking pattern emerges.

(12)	Direct	Indirect	Direct	
	San Antonio	San Antonio	San Miguel	Total
SiV	4	13	1	18
VS _i	42	45	60	147
StV	4	14	6	24
VSt	1	3	7	11

(Si stands for intransitive subject, St for transitive subject.) (12) shows that intransitive subjects exhibit a clear tendency to follow the verb, while transitive subjects tend to precede. The more common postverbal position for intransitive subjects is found, not only with verbs of "coming into being", as in (13), but other intransitive verbs as well, as in (14).

- (13) ra'm-t'-xwene--lax pe-se.mta'N.
 then-nom-arrive-plur art-children
 Then the children arrived. (p. 61)

- (14) te'peN t-u'le.t.
hurts noun-tooth, 1sg
My tooth hurts. (p. 62)

The higher frequency of VS order in (9) simply reflects the fact that intransitive subjects occur more frequently than transitive subjects, something that is probably universal for nominal (or lexical) subjects (cf. Du Bois 1987). In Spanish, intransitive subjects follow the verb more often than transitive subjects do, but not by as clear a margin of difference as that reflected in (11), so it seems unlikely that this difference is simply due to the influence of Spanish. This adds to the unlikeliness of the dominance of SVO order in Mason's texts being simply due to the influence of Spanish. If this were so, we might expect a higher frequency of SiV order as well. The fact that we do get a higher frequency of SiV order in the indirect texts suggests that their order has been influenced by Spanish. But the fact that the direct texts are overwhelmingly VS_i for intransitive subjects suggests that they do reflect natural Salinan order, and thus the fact that 6 out of 9 of the clauses with nominal subject and nominal object in these texts are SVO suggests that SVO was the dominant order in Salinan, although the figures are clearly too small to draw firm conclusions.

The data in (12) show that it is misleading to classify Salinan as an SVO language, since intransitive subjects, the more common type of subject, more often follows the verb. One is tempted to describe the word order in ergative terms, as most commonly Ergative-V-Absolutive. But this is misleading in two respects. First, since transitive subject nominals are less common than intransitive subject and objects nominals, such a characterization obscures the fact that nominals generally follow the verb in Salinan. The word order in the Salinan texts is very similar to that which one finds in typical verb-initial languages, in which most nominals follow the verb. The same is true for Salinan, the only difference being that the small class of transitive subject nominals more often precede the verb. Oblique nominals other than temporals also typically follow the verb, as in (15).

- (15) ra'm-pox ru-ø-to'ke k'aɬ'.
then-enter to-art-within grass
He enters the grass. (p. 62)

In the first 5 texts, all such nominals follow the verb; the count is given in (16).

- (16) VX 24
XV 0

The total for subjects, objects, and oblique nominals in these 5 texts is given in (17).

(17) Postverbal 81
Preverbal 5

Thus describing the language as Erg-V-Abs obscures the generally strong tendency for nominals to follow the verb. Two of the 5 preverbal nominals are transitive subjects in SVO sentences. The remaining 3 preverbal nominals all seem to be explainable in terms to be discussed below.

A further reason for questioning the appropriateness of describing Salinan as Erg-V-Abs is that it is not clear whether the relevant distinction is that of transitive subject versus intransitive subject as opposed to "subject in a clause containing a nominal or clausal object" versus "subject in a clause lacking a nominal or clausal object". Clauses of the latter sort include not only intransitive clauses, but also clauses with "pronominal" objects, using the term in a functional sense to include objects which are either understood in the context or represented by a suffix on the verb, as in (10) above.

The following table gives a breakdown of transitive clauses into those with nominal objects, those with clausal or infinitival objects, and those with pronominal objects (using this term, as above, to include objects expressed by suffixes on the verb).

(18)			Direct		Indirect		Direct		Total
			San	A.	San	A.	San	M.	
Nominal object	StV		3		11		4		18
	VS _t		0		1		2		3
Infin/Clausal obj	StV		1		3		1		5
	VS _t		0		1		0		1
Pronominal object	StV		0		0		1		1
	VS _t		1		1		5		7

The data in (18) shows that clauses containing transitive subjects and pronominal objects generally place the subject after the verb, while most clauses with a nominal object or infinitival/clausal object place the subject before the verb. The following examples, repeated from above, illustrate this contrast. In (19), the object is nominal and the subject precedes the verb.

(19) pe-ma't' se-p-astc'ene'e-ko-tén
art-beast again-act-beg-3sg,obj-plur(iterative)
be-k'e'ncanIL ...
art-God
The beast also begged God ... (p. 77)

In (20), the object is clausal and the subject precedes the verb.

- (20) be-ta' 'muL ram-ko'-p'iem.-o ti-tá·m tip'ha'to
art-puma then-neg-know-3sg.obj sub-house dung
pa·'ka.
cow
The puma did not know that the cow dung was a house. (p. 69)

But in (21), the object is pronominal, represented by a suffix on the verb, and the subject follows the verb.

- (21) a'm-pama·t'-ko pe-t-i·'itc-o.
then-chased-3sg,obj art-noun-dog-3sg,poss
Then his dog chased him. (p. 95)

The fact that in 7 of 8 examples with pronominal objects the subject follows the verb suggests that it is not transitive subjects that precede the verb but subjects of clauses in which there is a distinct nominal or clausal object. The class of subjects that tend to follow the verb are those in clauses lacking such an object, either intransitive clauses or transitive clauses in which the object is pronominal, as in (21). The effect of placing subjects of clauses containing nominal or clausal objects before the verb is to render infrequent clauses in which there are two nominals (or clauses), the subject and object, occurring on the same side of the verb, and to separate them by the verb. It should be noted, however, that there is no evidence of a tendency to place the subject before the verb if there is an oblique nominal (or prepositional phrase) in the clause. Clauses in which a subject and oblique both follow the verb are not uncommon, as in (22).

- (22) xo't'up' be-ta' 'muL ru-ø-t-e·m-o' ' .
passed art-puma by-art-noun-house-3sg,poss
Then the puma passed by his house. (p. 69)

The infrequency of clauses like (21) with nominal subject and pronominal object in these texts is itself something in need of explanation. Although studies of other languages have shown that transitive clauses with nominal subjects are generally infrequent, as noted above, clauses with pronominal objects are generally as common as those with nominal objects. For example, Du Bois (1987) reports that 53.1% of objects in his Sacapultec texts were affixal, a subclass of what I am calling pronominal objects. Why should such clauses be so infrequent in the Salinan texts? The answer seems to be, at least partly, that Salinan frequently employs a passive or passive-like construction in such contexts. In the direct San Antonio texts, there are 7 instances of passive or passive-like clauses in which the logical object is pronominal and the logical subject nominal, i.e. clauses which would involve a transitive subject

and a pronominal object if the clause were active. But since these clauses are passive, it is the grammatical subject that is pronominal, with a nominal "agent"-phrase. I refer to these clauses as passive or passive-like because the proper analysis of these clauses is not always clear to me. In four of these cases, the verb seems to be passive morphologically, as in (23).

- (23) ra'm-p-esnai'-ya tu- ϕ -sk'a'n'.
 then-act-hear-pass? by-art-hawk
 Then he was heard by Hawk. (p. 67)

In the remaining three cases, the verb does not seem to bear passive morphology, but the logical subject occurs with ru-, a variant of the prepositional proclitic tu-, as in (24):

- (24) ra'm- ϕ -te-ta'k ru- ϕ -k'e'nca-nIL ...
 then-nom-tell by-art-God
 Then he was told by God ... (p. 77)

The proper morphological analysis of the verb in (24) is not clear to me. It is possible that it is in fact passive. Whether the proper syntactic analysis for such clauses is that of a passive is not clear to me either. Although the number of such passive or passive-like clauses in the texts is quite low, they apparently provide a strategy that makes it possible to avoid transitive clauses with a nominal subject and a pronominal object.

A further factor relevant to the order of subject and verb in Salinan is position in the text. More specifically, text-initial clauses more often place the subject before the verb, as illustrated in the following table.

(25)		Initial	Noninitial
	SiV	3 (17%)	15 (10%)
	VS _i	12 (83%)	135 (90%)
	StV	7 (100%)	17 (61%)
	VS _t	0 (0%)	11 (39%)

In (25), the proportion of preverbal subjects is higher for text-initial clauses than it is for noninitial clauses, both among intransitive subjects and among transitive subjects: 17% of intransitive subjects in initial clauses precede the verb, while only 10% of intransitive subjects in noninitial clauses do; similarly, all transitive subjects in initial clauses precede the verb, while only 61% of those in noninitial clauses do. In addition there are three texts in which the initial clause involves an intransitive subject preceding an apparent predicate nominal, clauses which I have excluded from my counts, as in (26).

- (26) lē·o·' be-tē·'u k-ṭ-u'xo·ke ṭe-ṭ'o·'wat'.
 long.ago art-pelican stat-nom-murderer noun-people
 Long ago, Pelican was a murderer of people. (p. 77)

A tendency to place the subject early in a text-initial clause probably reflects a tendency to foreground the primary character of a tale at the beginning of the text.

Let me summarize this paper by examining the extent to which the principles discussed here account for all of the examples. I will restrict attention here to the direct texts, since there might be exceptions to these principles in the indirect texts due simply to influence from Spanish. The data for the direct texts is summarized in (27).

- (27) S_iV 5 S_tV 10
 VS_i 102 VS_t 8

The basic principle is that intransitive subjects follow the verb, while transitive subjects precede. What we would like to do is explain the 5 S_iV clauses and the 8 VS_t clauses. The explanation for 6 of the 8 VS_t clauses is straightforward: these are clauses in which there is no syntactically separate object. This leaves two unexplained VSO sentences. Of the 5 S_iV clauses, 2 are text-initial; as noted above, this seems to reflect a general tendency toward SV order in text-initial clauses. Of the remaining S_iV clauses, one occurs as a repetition in a song; its order may be due either to its occurring in a song, or to the repetition. The entire song is as follows:

- (28) ts'o'xwa·n-le'-to t-i'cxep-le'-to
 shrink-plur-3pl nom-foot-plur-3pl
 t-icxep-le'-to ts'o'xwa·n-le'-to
 nom-foot-plur-3pl shrink-plur-3pl
 His feet shrunk! His feet shrunk! (p. 67)

That leaves two unexplained instances of S_iV order.

We can conclude that Salinan word order, at least as illustrated in the texts examined, is largely accounted for by the principles discussed. Although it may be strictly accurate to describe Salinan as SVO, such a characterization is misleading since it is based on a class of sentences whose text frequency is low. Since the more common class of subjects, intransitive subjects, typically follow the verb, it would be more accurate to describe the language as VS and VO. But since transitive subjects in clauses containing a nominal object more commonly precede the verb, it is misleading to describe the language as VS. Hence the language is best classified as SVO, VS and VO.

Abbreviations			
act	active	art	article
nom	nominalized	stat	stative
sub	subordinate		

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