

# 97 Relationship between the Order of Object and Verb and the Order of Adjective and Noun

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### 1 Defining the values

This map shows the relationship between the order of object and verb and the order of adjective and noun; these two features are shown on Maps 83 and 87. This map is the third map showing the relationship between two typological features. Unlike the two previous maps, however, there is no correlation between the features or implicational relationship relating them: all four types defined on the intersection of these two features, the first four types shown in the box, are common.

1. Object-verb and adjective-noun (OV&AdjN)	201
2. Object-verb and noun-adjective (OV&NAdj)	287
3. Verb-object and adjective-noun (VO&AdjN)	100
4. Verb-object and noun-adjective (VO&NAdj)	404
5. Languages not falling into one of the preceding four types	178
total	1170

The first type, **OV and AdjN**, languages in which the object precedes the verb and the adjective precedes the noun, is illustrated in (1) from Udihe (Tungusic; Siberia), (1a) illustrating the OV word order, (1b) the AdjN order.

(1) Udihe (Nikolaeva and Tolskaya 2001: 840, 487)

- a. *mamasa ule:-we olokto-ini*  
old.woman meat-ACC cook-3SG  
O V  
'The old woman is cooking meat.'
- b. *uligdig'a-ŋku moxo-ziga*  
beautiful-PL cup-PL  
Adj N  
'beautiful cups'

The examples in (2) illustrate a language which is **OV and NAdj**, Kunuz Nubian (Nilo-Saharan; southern Egypt).

(2) Kunuz Nubian (Abdel-Hafiz 1988: 219, 283)

- a. *id ti:-g kanni:r-ken gos-s-u*  
man cow-ACC knife-INSTR slay-PST-3SG  
'The man slaughtered the cow with the knife.'
- b. *e:n duru-we:r*  
woman old-INDEF  
'an old woman'

The third type is languages which are **VO and AdjN**. This type is illustrated by English, as well as by Coast Tsimshian (Tsimshianic; British Columbia); the VO order is illustrated in (3a), the AdjN order in (3b).

(3) Coast Tsimshian (Mulder 1994: 32, 162)

- a. *yagwa-t huum=[da duus]=[a hoon]*  
PRES-3.ERG smell=[ERG cat]=[ABS fish]  
'The cat is sniffing the fish.'
- b. *'wii samn*  
great spruce.tree  
'a big spruce tree'

(Note that the case markers in Coast Tsimshian are prenominal but encliticize onto the preceding word; for example the absolutive case marker =a, which marks the object noun phrase *hoon* 'fish' as absolutive, attaches phonologically to *duus* 'cat', but grammatically

it goes with *hoon* 'fish'; the square brackets indicate the syntactic constituents.)

The fourth type is languages which are **VO and NAdj**. This type is represented by Olo (Torricelli; Papua New Guinea); both VO and NAdj orders are illustrated in (4).

(4) Olo (Staley 1995: 31)

- ki k-alei tifa fumi*  
1SG 1SG.SUBJ-eat.3SG.M.OBJ banana ripe  
'I eat a ripe banana.'

The fifth type shown on the map involves **languages not falling into one of the first four types**. It includes languages lacking a dominant order of object and verb or a dominant order of adjective and noun, as well as languages lacking a construction in which adjectives modify nouns because the closest equivalent involves internally headed relative clauses (see Chapter 87).

### 2 Geographical distribution

Languages which are OV and AdjN are especially common in much of Asia, except in the Middle East and in an area stretching from northeastern India through South-East Asia. Elsewhere in the world, this type is found scattered and in various small areas, though in many of these it is interspersed with OV and NAdj languages. These areas include (i) Ethiopia and Eritrea; (ii) two areas in Papua New Guinea, one in the eastern highlands, the other in the lower Sepik valley; (iii) an area in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico; and (iv) an area in Ecuador and adjacent parts of Brazil to the east.

Languages which are OV and NAdj are the dominant type in Australia and in New Guinea. They are also the dominant type in North America outside two well-defined areas in the Pacific North-West and Mesoamerica; of the four main types, they are the primary type represented in Canada and the United States east of the Rocky Mountains as well as in the north, including Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland. They are also the most frequent type in South America, though other types are common and the four types do not show clear areal patterning within South America. They are also found in (i) Myanmar and adjacent areas in India and China (all the languages in question being Tibeto-Burman); and (ii) various parts of Africa where OV languages are spoken.

Languages which are VO and AdjN are dominant in (i) an area in northern and eastern Europe; and (ii) the Pacific North-West. There are also smaller pockets in (i) an area in central Africa centred in the Central African Republic; (ii) Taiwan and the Philippines; (iii) the extreme northern part of Northern Territory in Australia; (iv) an area in southeastern Australia; (v) two pockets in Mesoamerica, one in the northern part of this region, the other in the south-east. This type is also represented by the different varieties of Chinese, though these do not show up on the map as a well-defined area.

Languages which are VO and NAdj are the dominant type in (i) western Europe and around the Mediterranean, including the Arabian Peninsula; (ii) sub-Saharan Africa; (iii) a large area stretching from South-East Asia eastward through the Pacific, except in the Philippines and New Guinea. They are also common in Mesoamerica, though there are also many VO and AdjN languages in this area, especially to the north and south-east.

### 3 Theoretical issues

The order of adjective and noun is often claimed to correlate with the order of object and verb. Dryer (1988a, 1992) argues against

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this, however, claiming that AdjN order occurs as often in VO languages as it does in OV languages. It has been known since Greenberg (1963) that many OV languages are NAdj. What Dryer (1988a, 1992) argues, however, is (i) that NAdj order is even more common among OV languages than had been realized, AdjN order being more common only in Eurasia; and (ii) that AdjN order is more common in VO languages than previously thought.

The first of these, that AdjN is more common among OV languages only in Eurasia, is reflected by the map. Nevertheless, the map somewhat exaggerates the frequency of OV and AdjN languages, for two reasons. First, the projection used shows areas further from the equator as somewhat larger than they really are. As a result, the area across northern Asia appears larger relative to equatorial regions than it actually is. Second, there are more languages and greater genealogical diversity in regions closer to the equator, so that there are a greater number of languages and genealogical groups (families and genera) with OV and NAdj languages than is reflected on the map. There are more languages in New Guinea, for example, than there are on the mainland of Europe and Asia combined. Similarly, there are more than twice as many languages in Africa as there are on the mainland of Europe and Asia combined.

In terms of raw numbers of languages, AdjN order is less common among VO languages than it is among OV languages. Similarly, in terms of raw numbers of languages, languages which are VO and NAdj are considerably more common on the map than languages which are VO and AdjN. But this is misleading. It reflects the fact that there are two very large language families, Niger-Congo and Austronesian, each containing about 20 per cent of the languages of the world, in which the majority of languages are VO and NAdj. More than half of the languages shown on the map which are VO and NAdj (221 out of 403) are in one of these two families: the vast majority of the VO and NAdj languages in sub-Saharan Africa are Niger-Congo, and most of the languages of this type in the region stretching from Indonesia eastward into the Pacific are Austronesian. If one counts, not number of languages, but number of genera—genealogical groups comparable to the subfamilies of Indo-European (see the Introduction to the Genealogical Language List)—containing languages of the various types, then the number of genera containing languages which are VO and NAdj is indeed greater than the number that are VO and AdjN. However, the ratio of genera containing NAdj languages to those containing AdjN languages is only slightly greater for VO languages than it is for OV languages. The following table gives the number of genera containing languages of the type given:

(5) OV&AdjN	70
OV&NAdj	136
VO&AdjN	51
VO&NAdj	95

The ratio of VO&NAdj to VO&AdjN is 1.86, which is actually less than the ratio of OV&NAdj to OV&AdjN, which is 1.94. Furthermore, if one counts the number of language families containing languages of each of the four types, assuming the highest level of classification in the Genealogical Language List as a criterion for what constitutes a family, we get the numbers in the following table:

(6) OV&AdjN	43
OV&NAdj	61
VO&AdjN	28
VO&NAdj	33

Here we find considerably more families containing OV&NAdj languages compared to OV&AdjN (61 families to 43), but only slightly more families containing VO & NAdj languages compared to VO&AdjN (33 families to 28).

The basis for the mistaken impression that many linguists have had that there is a correlation between the order of object and verb and the order of adjective and noun apparently derives from the fact that within Europe and Asia, there is the appearance of such a pattern. On the one hand, there is an overwhelming preference for AdjN order among the OV languages of Asia. Conversely, although there is a large area of VO languages in northern Europe with AdjN order, the VO languages of southwestern Europe are NAdj, as are a clear majority of the VO languages of South-East Asia. In addition, the fact that the majority of VO languages within two very large families, Niger-Congo and Austronesian, are NAdj adds to the impression.

In light of the above discussion, the data provide no basis for thinking that OV languages have any stronger preference for AdjN order than VO languages do. However, some have suggested (e.g. Greenberg 1963) that AdjN order is less frequent in verb-initial languages (as opposed to SVO languages, which like verb-initial languages are VO). But although this is not shown on this map, the languages used for the map do not support this hypothesis either. The numbers in (7) give the number of genera and number of families for the two orders of adjective and noun in verb-initial languages, analogous to the numbers given above in (5) and (6):

(7)	No. of genera	No. of families
Verb-initial&AdjN	35	24
Verb-initial&NAdj	34	18

The data in (7) provides no reason to think that AdjN order is any less frequent in verb-initial languages. If anything, AdjN order is more frequent in verb-initial languages, since AdjN outnumbers NAdj among verb-initial languages both in terms of numbers of genera (35 to 34) and in terms of numbers of families (24 to 18), while NAdj outnumbers AdjN both for OV languages and for VO languages in general (see (5) and (6) above). Examples of verb-initial languages which are AdjN include Coast Tsimshian, illustrated above in (3), Batad Ifugao (Austronesian; Philippines), illustrated in (8), and Gude (Chadic; Nigeria), illustrated in (9).

## (8) Batad Ifugao (Newell 1993: 15, 23)

- a. *in-dat* *Aligūyun* *nan* *dotag*  
 THEME.FOC:PST-give Aligūyun DEF meat  
*ay* *agī-na*  
 LOC brother-3SG  
 'Aligūyun gave the meat to his brother.'
- b. *nan* *nappuhi-n* *tibung*  
 DEF bad-LINK wine.jar  
 'the bad wine jar'

## (9) Gude (Hoskison 1983: 90, 53)

- a. *kə* *kii* *Musa* *faara*  
 COMP throw Musa stone  
 'Musa threw a stone.'
- b. *ma-gusə* *minə*  
 ATTR-short woman  
 'a short woman'

As discussed in Chapter 87, the term "adjective" is used here in a semantic sense, for words denoting properties, regardless of their word class in different languages. In many languages, adjectives are formally verbs, and hence as modifiers of nouns they constitute a type of relative clause. This raises the question of whether distinguishing different languages on the basis of the word class of such adjectival words within the language might lead to new generalizations. Preliminary results suggest that this is not the case, but further investigation is necessary.