SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN ESTABLISHING
THE BASIC WORD ORDER OF PODOKO

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The basic word order of Podoko is not obvious. The monologue perfective presents a fixed VSO order, but for the imperfective and the dialogue perfective VOS is the most frequent, though not the only order. The position of a focused element is established for the cases where word order is not fixed. Sentences with both subject and object present in nominal form but with another element clearly in focus are then examined. These show that subject precedes object when neither is in focus, pointing to the conclusion that the basic word order is in fact VSO.

1. Introduction

In the current interest in language universals, one of the areas that comes under consideration is that of basic word order, i.e. the relative order of subject, verb, and object. There seems to be little doubt as to the existence of a basic word order for any particular language: Greenberg [1963:76] writes, "The vast majority of languages have several variant orders but a single dominant one." He lists the possible orders, mentions which of these are nonexistent or at least very rare, and then goes on to state his first "universal" principle of word order [1963:77]:

Universal 1. In declarative sentences with nominal subject and object, the dominant order is almost always one in which the subject precedes the object.

This indicates that it is to declarative sentences that we should look for the basic order, and it seems to be presumed that when we do so "the dominant order" will be self-evident. Heine [1976:19], however, allows that the basic order may not always be quite so obvious, though he gives some suggestions for distinguishing it. He says that "basic order is the least marked: it has usually the highest text frequency, it tends to be used in positions of neutralization, and to have the smallest amount of morphological complexity."
It is generally recognized that the basic word order of most Chadic languages is SVO [Westermann and Bryan 1952:161]. In Podoko, a Chadic language of the Biu-Mandara branch, the SVO order does occur, but it is very restricted. It is found in conclusion sentences at the end of a section [Swackhamer 1980:13], as shown in (1), and in purpose clauses, as shown in (2). In both cases there is a special subject pronoun (v.m., "verbal marker", will be explained in section 2):

(1) ngaye təla slaɓa
   I cook meat
   'and so I cooked the meat'

(2) a säkwada säkwə bala bura ngaye vəə slaɓa
   v.m. buy buy father-my salt so-that-I cook meat
   'my father bought some salt so that I might cook the meat'

It is found in simultaneous time clauses:

(3) haya və vəə slaɓa laki, a tawi udzera
   while I cook meat particle v.m. cry child
   'while I am cooking the meat, the child is crying'

And it is found in certain negative constructions:

(4) a taka və vəə slaɓa la
   v.m. f.s. I cook meat not try
   'I was not cooking the meat'

1 More specifically, Newman [1977] classifies Podoko as belonging to the A subbranch of Biu-Mandara. It is spoken in the District of Mora in the Margui-Wandala Division of the North Province of Cameroon. The research for this paper was undertaken during 1980, under the auspices of the Délégation Générale à la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (formerly ONAREST) in cooperation with the Institut des Sciences Humaines (I.S.H.) and the Centre de Recherches sur les Langues et Traditions Orales Africaines (CERELTRA) of the United Republic of Cameroon.

2 Tone is not marked because it has not yet been fully analyzed. Apart from that, the transcription of all examples is phonemic. The voiceless and voiced lateral fricatives are represented by sļ and zļ respectively. Ts, dz, mb, nd, ng, ndz, kw, gw, hw, ngw also each stand for a single phoneme. A raised y preceding a word indicates the palatalisation of that word.
(This last may not really be an example of SVO order, because ṭaka may be a form of the verb 'try' rather than a fronted subject (f.s.) marker, and this construction may have developed from 'I tried not to...'.)

Westermann and Bryan [1952:161] say of Podoko: "In Paduko the Pronoun Subject follows the Verb, but the Noun Subject precedes it." However, not only do the examples already given disagree with this, but so do the examples of more normal word order which will be given later in this paper.

Despite the special use of the SVO order and despite Westermann's comment on Podoko, the basic word order of Podoko is clearly verb initial. That being so, one would expect the basic word order to be VSO in accordance with Greenberg's universal principle. It is true that many sentences do have this order, but there are also, particularly in conversation, many apparently unmarked declarative sentences (that is, unmarked for focus) which present the supposedly very rare VOS order. There is no difference in morphological complexity, and it is difficult, at least at first sight, to see one order as less marked than the other. As Heine's criteria, then, offer no clear solution to establishing the basic order for Podoko, other criteria must be found. In this paper the aspectual system in narrative and conversation will be examined and then also the focus system. From this, it will become evident that the basic word order is in fact the more generally common VSO.

2. Aspect and Discourse

In Podoko there is a basic distinction between narrative and non-narrative. When a speaker utters a long enough sequence of sentences, he speaks in a narrative style (here called "monologue"), with its characteristic verb form and subject pronoun in the perfective aspect (referred to as "monologue perfective" or M.P.). When he is engaged in conversational exchanges (here called "dialogue") he uses a different form for the perfective (referred to as "dialogue perfective" or D.P.). This monologue-dialogue distinction is neutralised, however, when the speaker uses the imperfective aspect (Imp.). The following chart shows the aspectual and monologue-dialogue distinctions, together with their characteristic markers:
The M.P. is characterised by the lack of VP-initial /a/ and by the subject pronoun (when the subject is not a noun) drawn from pronoun series 1:

(5) tøla maye sëla'ba 'my mother cooked meat'

cook mother-my meat

(6) tøla maye sëla'ba 'I cooked meat'

cook I meat

The D.P. and Imp. by contrast have a VP-initial /a/ (though this is often deleted when the VP is not at the beginning of a sentence, e.g. when it is preceded by a conjunction or a subordinate clause), and they take a subject pronoun of series 2. The Imp. verb is palatalised if transitive. (Intransitive Imp. verbs take a final /-i/, but intransitives are not considered here because it is the relative order of subject and object that is of interest.)

3The complete paradigms for these pronoun series are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun series 1</th>
<th>Pronoun series 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ls. maye</td>
<td>yø</td>
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<td>2s. ka</td>
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<td>3s. nga</td>
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<td>1p.ex. mananø</td>
<td>nane</td>
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<td>1p.in. mame</td>
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<td>2p. kwø</td>
<td>kwø</td>
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<tr>
<td>3p. møta</td>
<td>ta</td>
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</table>
With the M.P., an invariable VSO order is found, as in (5) and (6). The D.P. and Imp., however, while sometimes showing a VSO order, frequently show VOS, as in (7-10). Examples (7) and (9) are the replies to the questions "What did one do?" and "What is one doing?" respectively. As the replies to such questions consist entirely of new information, one would expect them to be free from focus on any one of the elements (verb, subject, or object) and therefore to exhibit the basic word order. But that would give two basic word orders: the common VSO for the M.P. and the rare VOS for the D.P. and the Imp. It is at this point that we need to turn our attention to focus and see how this affects word order.

3. Focus and Word Order

In the M.P., new information cannot be focused by a change in word order, though presupposed information can be defocused by pronominalisation (in the case of the subject) or by deletion (in the case of the direct and indirect object):

(11) taləda məla slaɅa ake bala
    cook-for-him mother-my meat for father-my
    'my mother cooked meat for my father'

(12) a. taləda məla
    cook-for-him mother-my
    'my mother cooked it for him'
b. taləda məla slaɅa
    cook-for-him mother-my meat
    'my mother cooked meat for him'
c. taləda nga ake bala
    cook-for-him she for father-my
    'she cooked it for my father'
d. taləda nga
    cook-for-him she
    'she cooked it for him'
With the D.P. and the Imp., on the other hand, new (focused) information is put in the focus slot. In Gude [Hoskison 1975:228], a VSO Chadic language, the focused element precedes the VP, but in Podoko the focus slot is immediately after the verb:

(13) a. a ṭela wa slẹba na? 'who cooked the meat?'
    cook who meat int.
    b. a ṭela mala 'my mother cooked it'
        cook mother-my

(14) a. a ṭela tawę ndi na? 'what did one cook?'
    cook what one int.
    b. a ṭela slẹba nda 'one cooked meat'
        cook meat one

(15) a. a ṭela ta wa ndi slẹba na? 'for whom did one cook
    cook for whom one meat int. the meat?'
    b. a ṭela ta balę nda 'one cooked it for
        cook for father-my one
        my father'

(16) a. a ṭela a tawę ndi slẹba na? 'with what did one
    cook with what one meat int. cook the meat?'
    b. a ṭela a male nda 'one cooked it with
        cook with oil one
        oil'

(17) a. a ṭela hawę ndi slẹba na? 'where did one cook
    cook in kitchen one
    the meat?'
    b. a ṭela de ykwẹọ̀ọọ nda 'one cooked it in
        cook in kitchen one
        the kitchen'

As with the M.P., an unfocused subject is pronominalised and an unfocused object is normally deleted.

When it is the verb that is in focus, the verb is reduplicated, thus filling the focus slot. (There are two types of reduplication, simple and complex. Both are used for verb focus, but as the simple one has other functions too, the following examples use only the complex type.)

(18) a. a bakala tawę ndi a slẹba na? 'what did one do with
    do what one with meat int. the meat?
    b. a ṭela a ści ti mala 'my mother cooked it'
        cook with cooking mother-my

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Examples given are D.P. because this has been more thoroughly analysed than the Imp.
4. Order of Unfocused Elements

While it is true that the object is generally deleted when it is presupposed information, it may on occasion be left undeleted:

(19) a. a tøla wa siæø na?  'who cooked the meat?'
    cook who meat int.

  b. a tøla maæø siæø  'my mother cooked the meat'
    cook mother-my meat

This can give an important clue to the basic word order, because when the verb is in focus, the subject and object (if both are present) are presumably both out of focus and thereby in their natural order, neither of them having been shifted to the focus slot. This is what we find:

(20) a. a Sakøla tawø mala a siæø na?  
    do what mother-my with meat int.
    'what did my mother do with the meat?'

  b. a tøla a ti mala siæø  
    cook with cooking mother-my meat
    V S O
    'my mother cooked the meat'

This example shows that when the subject and object are both present and neither is in focus the subject precedes the object. This holds good also for beneficiary and locative focus:

(21) a. a tøla ta wa mala siæø na?  
    cook for whom mother-my meat int.
    'for whom did my mother cook the meat?'

  b. a tøla ta bøla mala siæø  
    cook for father-my mother-my meat
    'my mother cooked the meat for my father'

(22) a. a tøla hawø mala siæø na?  
    cook where mother-my meat int.
    'where did my mother cook the meat?'

  b. a tøla de ykwøæø mala siæø  
    cook in kitchen mother-my meat
    'my mother cooked the meat in the kitchen'

It is clear, then, that the subject precedes the object when neither is
in focus. This confirms the VSO order, as found in the M.P. and in accordance with Greenberg's first universal principle. The VOS order of (7-10) is expli-
cable if we consider that it is the object that bears the focus when the whole sentence is new information. Hyman [1979:2] claims that "the focus of a clause tends, in the expected case, to line up with the (direct) object position". That is to say, the expected place for introducing new information is in the object. It is therefore not surprising that Podoko uses the object-focus form even when the new information is included in more than just the object. VSO is then the basic order, but object focus is very frequent in the D.P. and Imp.

5. Conclusion

When the basic word order of a language is not clear, one cannot just fall back on generalisations from other languages, though of course these are not to be ignored. This paper has shown that a study of focus can contribute towards an understanding of the basic order. By establishing that the position immediately following the verb is the focus position, and by putting something other than the subject or object into this focus slot, one can find the un-
marked, unfocused position of the subject and object relative to each other and to the verb.

This study may serve as a caution to linguists who are engaged in estab-
lishing the basic word order of a language. It is important to be aware of the possibility of putting the object in the focus slot when it is more than just the object that is new information. An apparently neutral declarative sentence may in fact have the object in focus position (usually before or after the verb) in order to mark itself as being entirely composed of new information. It is therefore essential to take note of the relative order of unfocused elements in a sentence where another element is clearly in focus, because it is only then that one can be sure that these elements really are out of focus. As has been shown in the case of Podoko, it may be the examin-
ation of the relative order of the unfocused elements in a sentence with fo-
cus that is the deciding factor in establishing the basic word order.
APPENDIX

Podoko Folktale, as told by Deva Dagudza

1Tatapæa mandza. 2Ysuta. 3A nda nde ñngædë mude nesa. "Bakada nga (story) (speak) v.m. there-is certain old woman do she
Yudze vëhwa mëna. 5Zlagwakwa nga nda kwëdambayë da ñëfa. 6YManë laki,
little field her sow-into she pl. aubergine into it this part.
gæa kwëdambayë. 7Ytata gæa gæa kwëdambayë, ba dada de, "Da ymbadë vala
grow aubergine after grow grow aubergine when go go(she) go gather it
yë na," nga kæa laki, a mbadëla mbaaë indala. 8Yusëdike mëna zlaa
I part. say she part. v.m. gather gather hyena tomorrow its again
Y'lsa nga zlaa. 9"A da ymbadë vala yë na," nga kæa laki, a mbadëla
come he again v.m. go gather it I part. say she part. v.m. gather
mbadë indala. 10Ba tæa tæa kwëdambayë mëna, "Da ymbadë vala yë na,"
gather hyena when ripen ripen aubergine her go gather it I part.
nga kæa laki, a mbadëla mbaaë indala. 11A nda gæa dzala
say she part. v.m. gather gather hyena v.m. there-is equal hurt-to-her
nga akë mude nesa la. 12"A dada yë ninga," nga kæa. 13Kasa nga yudze
it to old woman not v.m. bush I today say she take she little
Y'ædængë mëna, kæa dada. 14Kæa y'kæa ñëgwasla. 15Ytawe ytawe ytawe
axe her she bush she chop wood id.(chopping)
Y'kæa ñëgwasla mëna, y'lsa ñngædë indala. 16"A ñbaa këa këa waka
chop(she) wood her come certain hyena v.m. do what you you
Y'hanë na?" nga kæa takina. 17"A y'kæa ñëgwasla mëa yëa," nga mude nesa.
here int. say he to-her v.m. chop wood my I say old woman
18"Aa ytaana ytawe ka ytawi na na?" 19"A zlagada kwëdambayë mëa yëa
v.m. what cry you cry part. int. v.m. sow aubergine my I
laki, ba kæa 'Da ymbadë vala yë na,' nga ngayë laki, a mbadëla mbaaë
part. when every go gather it I part. say I part. v.m. gather
indala." 20"A y'kæa y'maka la. 21Ba nda laki tida te ka
hyena v.m. difficult that not if part. brew-for-me brew you
dulu wayë laki, a y'kæa y'kæa yëa," nga indala takina. 22"A
beer me part. v.m. catch-for-you catch I say hyena to-her v.m.
zla yë ba ykwata ba nda y'kæsi ka," nga mude nesa takina.
rejoice I part. much if catch-for-me you say old woman to-him
23"Aa da su daase ka na kiya na?" nga mude nesa. 24"A da du
v.m. go come-up when you part. part. int. say old woman v.m. go go-up
I tomorrow alright say old woman f.s. old woman go home brew
mude nesa dula. 28YTeta talada te ndi dula, ake su
old woman beer after brew-for-him brew one beer suddenly come-up
indala. 29A du da indala laki, "Haweh na?" nga indala takina. 30"Nga
hyena v.m. go-up go hyena part. where int. say hyena to-her here
ina henga," nga mude nesa. 31Ya ndi dula. 32YSelu nga. 33Kene da
it here say old woman give one beer drink he go
hena heni da vehwe kwedambaya. 34Kweda hena hena Yhakenga,
lie-down lie-down in field aubergine while lie lie(he) there
ake Ytsa Yngedhe indala. 35Ytsa ndi sa kwedambaya nga tete tete zla
suddenly come certain hyena come one to aubergine this ripe ripe again
laki, Yfawelu ndi Yfawelu ndi kwedambaya. 36Yndakhe nga ndi laki,
part. put-up one put-up one aubergine id.(turn and see) say one part.
a ndzi Yngedhe Ytakwase Ylalala. 37"Kayeh! Mawe Ydala Ytakwase Ymane na?
v.m. stay certain thing id.(drip) oh what good thing this int.
38Nda gera tsari mena la nanga. 39A tapa tape ya," nga nda.
there-is equal good it not part. v.m. taste taste I say one
40YLemache nga ndi tapa nga laki, a nda gera tsari mena la.
id.(lick) say one taste he part. v.m. there-is equal good its not
41"A Yzase Yze ya duwa, ngayeh tapa nga Ywala Ywala," v.m. approach-under approach I go-up so-that-I taste it really really
nge nda. 42Aseduke nga ndi dekwa nga da zadara. 43Nderze nga ndi
say one id. say one go-into he into bottom id.(squeeze) say one
ngwadalu nga a zadara. 44"Teta ngwadalu ngwade ndi laki, "Mude nesa, Ytsa
bind-him he on bottom after bind-him bind one part. old woman come
Ytsa na. 45Ya kesa kesa ya mazlamena," nga ndi taka mude nesa.
come part. v.m. catch catch I now say one to old woman
46"Ytsa Ytsa ba a Ymekwetsa maka ka Yndalela kwara ba a zadara," come part. v.m. your knife your you cut-to-him neck part. on bottom
nge nda. 47"Aya," nga mude nesa. 48Ytsa nga a Ymekwetsa. 49"Ka
say one alright say old woman come she with knife let-me
Ypalekese nga na; bi a ndela a ndeli ka," nga ndi takina.
release-to-you it part. perhaps v.m. cut with cutting you say one to-her
50"Ahala. A Ykede ya a Ykedi la. 51Sayeh ba Ydzerela maye Ymane
no v.m. kill I with killing not only part. see I this
Ytakwase Yze kwedambaye maye" nga mude nesa. 52"Aye degiya a da piya
thing lose aubergine my say old woman (warning) v.m. fut. hold
ka la," nga ndi taka mude nesa. 53"A piya piya ya," nga kena. 54Ymane
you not say one to old woman v.m. hold hold I say she this
part. v.m. let-me release-to-you it part. say one alright say
mude nesa. 56 Ydangela mude nesa zadara. 57 Tase nga ndi Yelelase old woman place old woman bottom id.(release) say one release-

nga laki, kwape nga mude nesa da hala. 58 Ndaka Ydangwe dangwangwe to-her he part. id.(fall) say old woman to ground then id.(roll)

nga mude nesa da hala. 59 Na ma sa walakada wale ya la na say old woman to ground here part. past speak-to-you speak I not part.

na? nga indala takina. 60 "Ba dzira udzere maya," nga kena. 61 "Aya int. say hyena to-her part. truth child my say she v.m.

Gakavade kena ya mazlamena na kiya na?" nga kena. 62 "Saye zla ka do how I now part. part. int. say she only again you

Yerdase ti Yngadu dula. 63 Lekwetu ngaye da mba Ykeseko nga na," repeat brew other beer then I fut. can catch-for-you it part.

nga indala takina zlaSa. 64 "Aya," nga kena. 65 Tada nga duli zlaSa. say hyena to-her again alright say she brew she beer again

66 Ytsa indala nga kwetera. 67 Yselu nga. 68 Hena nga de yehwe kwadambaye come hyena that one drink he lie-down he in field aubergine

zlaSa. 69 Ydangela nga zadara nga duli nga yabi saha de zadara again place he bottom so-that beer that drip down-from in bottom

Yalalalalalala. 70 Ytsa ndi zlaSa laki, tapa nda. 71 Kaye! YMangela id.(drip) come one again part. taste one oh this

Ytakwase Ymane sa kesi Ykeso zlaSa degiye," nga nda. 72 Ba tapa thing this past catch-me catch again part. say one part. taste

tape nda, tsara. 73 Ba tapa tape nda, tsara. 74 A Yzase taste one good part. taste one good v.m. approach-under

Yze ya du zla laki, nda gera tsari mana la." 75 Aseduko nga approach I go-up again part. there-is equal good its not id. say

ndi dskwa nga zla laki, nderze nga ndi ngwedalu nga a zadara. one go-into he again part. id.(squeeze) say one bind-him he on bottom

76 "Ya kesa keso ya mazlamena na. 77 Ytsa Ytsa ba a YMekwetsa v.m. catch catch I now part. come come part. with knife

makau," nga ndi taka mude nesa. 78 Nge mudu nesa Ytsa ba a YMekwetsa your say one to old woman f.s. old woman come part. with knife

mena. 79 YNdela mude nesa kwara ake indala kenga. 80 YNdaka kesa ndi her cut-to-him old woman neck to hyena that then catch one

mazlamena indala ha Yratsela mete indala. 81 A gwatsara YNdaka mudu no now hyena until cut they hyena v.m. find thus old

nese ake kwadambaye mena. 82 Ha kene Ymbadawo nga mazlamena. 83 Dzibazla woman to aubergine her until she gather it now

fetela.

tail
Translation

1 I'm going to tell you a story.

2 "Speak!"

3 There was a certain old woman. 4-5 She made her little field and sowed aubergines in it. 6 The aubergines grew. 7 When the aubergines had grown, she said, "I'm going to pick them," but the hyena had already picked them. 8 The next day he came again. 9 "I'm going to pick them," she said, but the hyena had already picked them. 10 When her aubergines had ripened she said that she was going to pick them, but the hyena had already picked them. 11 The old woman was very upset. 12 "I'm going to the bush today," she said. 13 She took her little axe and went to the bush. 14-16 She was chopping her wood. A certain hyena came and said to her, "What are you doing here?" 17 "I'm chopping my wood," said the old woman. 18 "Why are you crying?" 19 "I sowed some aubergines, and every time I go to pick them the hyena has already picked them." 20 "That's no problem. If you brew me some beer I'll catch him for you," said the hyena to her. 22 "I'll be very happy if you do catch him for me," she replied. 23 "When will you come up?" 24 "I'll come tomorrow." 25-26 "Alright," said the old woman, and went home.

27 The old woman brewed some beer. 28 When she had brewed the beer the hyena came straight up. 29 When he arrived he asked where the beer was. 30 "Here it is," said the old woman. 31-33 She gave it to him, he drank it up and went to lie down in the field of aubergines.

34 While he was lying there the other hyena suddenly arrived. 35 He came to those ripe aubergines again and stuffed them into his mouth. 36 He looked round and saw something dripping. [The beer was dripping from the rump of the other hyena.] 37 "What's this good thing? 38 It's very good. 39 I'm going to taste it," he said. 40 So he tasted it, and it was very good. 41 "I'm going to go up closer in order really to taste it," he said. 42-43 He entered into his bowels and got trapped. 44-45 The one who had caught him cried out to the old woman, "Old woman, come, I've caught him now! 46 Bring your knife so that you can cut his throat on my rump." 47-48 "Alright," said the old woman, and came with her knife. 49 "Let me release him for you. Perhaps you will be able to cut him," he said to her. 50-51 "No, I won't kill this thing that's been destroying my aubergines without seeing him first," said the old woman. 52 "But you won't be able to hold him," he told her. 53 "I will hold him," she said. 54 "I'll let him out for you then," he said. 55 "Alright," said the old woman. 56 She stood behind him. 57-58 He let him out, but she fell down and rolled on the ground. 59 "There! What did I tell you?" the hyena said to her. 60 "It's true, my child," she said. 61 "What am I to do now?" 62-63 "Just brew another lot of beer and I'll be able to catch him for you again." 64 "Alright," she said.

65-66 She brewed some more beer and the hyena came. 67-68 He drank it and went to lie down in the field of aubergines again. 69 He positioned his rump so that the beer should drip down from it. 70 The other hyena came again and tasted it. 71 "This is the thing that got me caught before," he said. 72 He tasted it; it was good. 73 He tasted it; it was good. 74 "I'm going up closer again, it's so good." 75 He entered into his bowels again and got caught.
"I've caught him now! Come with your knife!" called the captor to the old woman. She came with her knife and cut the throat of that hyena. So they caught him now and cut him into pieces. That's how the old woman rescued her aubergines. Now she can pick them. The end.

REFERENCES


