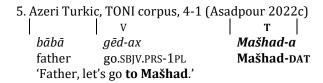Hiwa Asadpour

A comparative study of Target Word Order Variation among the low-resource languages of northwestern Iran

Keywords: Target; Word Order; Armenian; Azeri Turkic; Kurdish; Neo-Aramaic

The establishment of a basic "order of meaningful elements" of sentences manifesting itself in abbreviations like SVO (subject-verb-object), VSO (verb-subject-object), or SOV (subject-object-verb) has been a common procedure in typologizing natural languages since J. Greenberg's seminal article of 1963. As the abbreviations show, these types are usually restricted to the most salient elements of syntax, namely, the subject, the verbal predicate and a primary (direct) object; less salient elements such as indirect objects of verbs of giving or goals of motion verbs are usually not taken into account. More recently, the postverbal placement of these elements received special attention by the seminal work of Haig (notably 2015, 2017, 2022). Several more studies attempted to explain the postverbality of these elements, for example Stilo (2018), Bulut (2022), Jügel (2022), Korn (2022), Noorlander and Molin (2022), among others. In this study, I choose a different approach and following Asadpour (2022a, b, c), I summarize the objectives of this study under the term "Targets" and the word order of these elements is the focus of this research. Targets are just these elements and the syntactic positions they can take; this includes "Destinations", i.e., physical goals, of "MOTION and CAUSED-MOTION verbs", "Recipients of GIVE verbs", "Addressees of SAY verbs", "Beneficiaries of BENEFI-CIARY verbs", "Resultant-States of CHANGE-of-STATE verbs", and metaphorical Goals of SHOW and LOOK verbs, see examples below for illustration.

1. Mukri Kurdish (Asadpour 2022c, TONI corpus, CS_124c)

V	P	T
da-řo-m	*bo*	*madrasa-y*
IPFV-go.PRS-1SG	**to**	**school-OBL**

'(I) go **to school**.'

2. Northeastern Kurdish (Asadpour 2022c, TONI corpus, AD_03)

V	P	T
čū	*sa*	*dāy-e*
go.PST.3SG	**on**	**tree-OBL**

'(he) went **on top of the tree**.'

3. Armenian (Asadpour 2022c, TONI corpus, 8-1.19a)

V		T
ēt'um	*im*	*dproç*
go.PST	COP.1SG	**school**

'(I) was going to **school**.'

4. Jewish Neo-Aramaic (Khan 2008: 428, J149A)

X	V	**T**
yrəqli,	*ədyéli*	***belá***
run.off.PST.1SG	come.back.PST.1SG	**home**

'(I) ran off and came back **home**.'

5. Azeri Turkic, TONI corpus, 4-1 (Asadpour 2022c)

	V		**T**
bābā	*gēd-ax*		***Mašhad-a***
father	go.SBJV.PRS-1PL		**Mašhad-DAT**

'Father, let's go **to Mašhad**.'

The languages investigated in this research are all located in northwestern Iran, a region that is indeed appropriate for such a study, given that we here meet Azeri, a Turkic language with an alleged SOV structure, Jewish Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (J. NENA), a Semitic language which is likely to have inherited a VSO order, and three Indo-European vernaculars whose basic order is less clearly determinable, namely, two Iranian varieties (Mukri and Northeastern Kurdish, NEK) and Eastern Armenian. In spite of the fundamental differences in syntactic structure that one would expect, all these "languages share a peculiarity in word ordering, viz. the placement of Targets in the immediate postverbal position" Asadpour (2022a, b, c); an observation that was the impulse of this research. In order to verify to what extent the languages behave similarly or differently with respect to the positioning of "Targets", to what extent the positioning can vary in the five vernaculars and whether language contact (Haig 2015, 2017, 2022) may be assumed to be a responsible factor (in the sense of an areal feature), I established a large database (the "TONI corpus") of recorded spoken materials in the five vernaculars, which I used as the empirical basis for my investigations; additional information was procured by inquiries with native speakers, partly via crowdsourcing. The personal field data has been accompanied by other sets of published narrative speech corpora (e.g., Khan 2008; Kıral 2001; Öpengin 2016). These data are additionally analyzed with respect to other identifying factors (e.g., morphosyntactic, semantic, discourse-pragmatic, and cognitive) to find out which one may trigger word order variation. The results show that there is no single, categorical factor which determines word order and none of the main categories such as information structure, semantics, or morphosyntax can be compared to each other neither can they be generalized cross-linguistically rather they are interconnected. Finally, the results of this study will be contrasted with the existing literature and I will offer a new perspective on typologizing the aforementioned languages in terms of their word order variation.

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