EVIDENCE FOR OBJECT-VERB ORDERING IN CHADIC

Donald A. Burquest
University of Texas at Arlington

In his 1979 book, Givón sets forth the claim that SOV is the universal word order. He says,

> It seems that the majority of language families known to us exhibit SUBJECT-OBJECT-VERB (SOV) syntax, and so far as one can tell they were always SOV... The overwhelming majority of languages and language families which do not show actual SOV syntax currently, can be nevertheless reconstructed via internal and comparative methods back to an earlier SOV stage. In other words, either their syntax or—at the very least—their bound morphology exhibit coherent relics of the earlier SOV stage ...(p.275)

Regarding Afro-Asiatic languages particularly he says in a footnote to the above: "Kushitic is SOV and Semitic can be reconstructed to SOV. The entire Afro-Asiatic group must have been SOV, as a detailed analysis of the bound morphology [of] Chadic, Berber, and Old Egyptian is bound to show." This note presents evidence of OV ordering in Angas morphology as a step toward providing the Chadic evidence.

The unmarked ordering of constituents in the Angas clause is SVO. Note the following examples:

(1) Musa siɬ as   'Musa bought a dog'
        buy dog

(2) Musa ne shwe   'Musa saw the corn'
        see corn

(3) Musa kaɬ mbandar   'Musa got a basket'
        get basket

In addition, the two most productive patterns of nominalization show the verb preceding the object. In the first of these the initial noun (comparable to the clause-level subject) occurs obligatorily with low tone, and the verb is in its verbal noun form:

(4) ngò   kɑrm   naɱ   'butcher'
    person slaughtering animal

(5) mbì   cək   shwe   'threshing tool'
    thing beating corn

(6) yə̀n   pən   nkam   'tonic'
     medicine giving health

    In the second productive nominalization pattern no subject occurs; the
verb occurs first and is in the verbal noun form, and it is joined to the fol-
lowing object by the morpheme kə̀ 'of':

(7) d͡yip   kə̀ shwe   'harvesting'
     harvesting of corn

(8) ten   kə̀ nfutat   'sewing'
     sewing of cloth

(9) shwe   kə̀ mbandar   'basket-weaving'
     weaving of basket

Both of these patterns are currently productive, and the examples can be ex-
panded readily.

    In contrast to the above constructions, which illustrate the current SVO
order, there are two types of apparently non-productive nominalization in
which the relevant order is OV. Such non-productive patterns are potential
evidence for an earlier ordering, as Givón claims. In the first type there
is a characteristic tone pattern of low tone obligatorily occurring on the
verb. The following is the entire inventory of such forms known to me:

(10) shwe-d͡yì p   'harvesting'
      corn-harvest

(11) d͡o-lè   'shouting'
      voice-raise

(12) shət-cə̀n   'working'
      work-do

(13) kok-tù   'playing'
      game-play

(14) yəl-sè   'gratitude'
      earth-eat

(15) shək-tòk   'message'
      word-speak

(16) ke-ɓ̂àm   'rescue'
      head-snatch

(17) pi-dùr   'command'
      place-command

(18) po-lèng   'argument'
      mouth-think

    In the second non-productive pattern the verb occurs in its verbal noun

form, and the preceding noun object occurs with obligatorily low tone. All examples known to me have the generic mbì as the noun object:

(19) mbì-se   'food'
      thing-eating

(20) mbì-ɗyip   'harvest'
      thing-harvesting

(21) mbì-kat   'wealth'
      thing-getting

(22) mbì-kop   'crop'
      thing-planting

(23) mbì-sit   'merchandise'
      thing-selling

   We see, then, that although SVO is the pattern of ordering in the clause and in productive nominalization in Angas, there is evidence for OV ordering in non-productive nominalization patterns. This data thus provides a beginning body of evidence for object-verb ordering in Chadic, as Givón predicted would be found.

REFERENCE

Givón, T. 1979. *On Understanding Grammar*. New York: Academic Press.