EVIDENCE FOR OBJECT-VERB ORDERING IN CHADIC

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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 SOY 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 SOY 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 sit as
    buy dog
    'Musa bought a dog'
(2) Musa ne shwe
    see corn
    'Musa saw the corn'
(3) Musa kat mbandar
    get basket
    'Musa got a 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 karm
    person slaughtering
    nam animal
    'butcher'
(5) mbá cäk shwe
    thing beating corn
    'threshing tool'
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 following object by the morpheme ƙà 'of':

(7) ƙyìp ƙà shwe
harvesting of corn

(8) ten ƙà nfutat
sewing of cloth

(9) shwe ƙà mbandar
weaving of basket

Both of these patterns are currently productive, and the examples can be expanded 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-ƙyìp
corn-harvest

(11) ƙâ-lè
voice-raise

(12) shat-càn
work-do

(13) kok-tù
game-play

(14) yel-sè
earth-eat

(15) shek-tòk
word-speak

(16) ke-ƙàn
head-snatch

(17) pi-dùr
place-command

(18) po-lèng
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 mbl as the noun object:

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

(20) mbl-dyip
thing-harvesting
'harvest'

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

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

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

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
