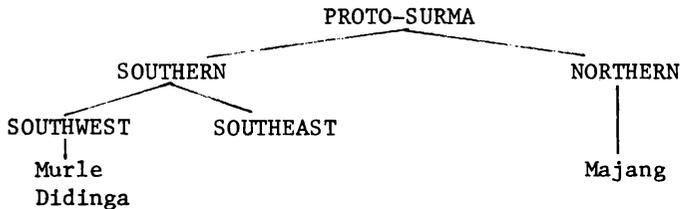


A TYPOLOGICAL ANOMALY IN SOME SURMA LANGUAGES*

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This paper presents evidence that at least three languages in the Surma group (and possibly also Proto-Surma) are exceptions to the proposed typological "universal" that languages with basic VSO word order do not have post-positions [Greenberg 1963:78]. There is no attempt made here to hypothesize how this came about, only to call attention to the fact that these three languages are typologically anomalous.

The Surma languages are found on both sides of the Ethiopia-Sudan border, in the southern parts of both countries. Surma is classed as part of the Eastern Sudanic Phylum, within the Nilo-Saharan family [Bender 1983:2]. Fleming [1983:533] has sub-divided the Surma languages, with the following abbreviated chart showing the higher levels of division and the relationships among the languages under discussion.



Data on Murle is from Lyth [1971] and Arensen [1982]. Arensen [1982:52] states that the basic order of elements in a sentence is VSO, illustrated in (1) and (2).

- (1) kioina naana kiziwan balawaaz 'yesterday I saw a buffalo' (p. 115)
I-saw I buffalo yesterday

*My Majang field work has been conducted under the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, from 1984-1986. Janet Leitch and Glenn Davis did initial typological studies of Majang and Murle, respectively, at the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of North Dakota, 1986, and shared the results with me.

- (2) ajukek eeti dila lili 'the man throws the spear into the
throws-to man spear river river' (p. 138)

Murle uses VSO order in negative sentences [Arensen 1982:116], but I have argued elsewhere that SVO negative sentences in Southwest Surma derive from VSO [Unseth 1986].

Murle marks locations with postpositions, as is shown in (3-5). As Lyth (a layman) observed, some "prepositions follow their objects" [Lyth 1971:43]. The postpositions are all suffixed with -a, the locative case marker.

- (3) balawaaz kicina naana maat keet loota
yesterday I-saw I lions tree under
'yesterday, I saw lions under the tree' [Arensen 1982:117]
- (4) arek keet tadena 'put it up in the tree'
put tree on [Lyth 1971:9]
- (5) aavi ced vuruta 'he is behind the house'
he-is house behind [Lyth 1971:9]

For Didinga, Driberg [1931:153] noted, "The order is always verb - subject - object." Additional Didinga data is provided by Odden [1983].

- (6) uhud lotaparimoi mertii 'Lotaparimoi drank beer'
drank Lotaparimoi beer [Driberg 1931:154]
- (7) ižina dogoléeec ηAnEEtA 'the child saw me'
saw child me [Odden 1983:170]

The presence of postpositions in Didinga is illustrated in (8a), (8b), and (9).

- (8) a. muúra kújén 'on the hill'
hill on [Odden 1983:169]
- b. tAnηA kújén 'on the cow'
cow on [Odden 1983:169]
- (9) ai othori eraga uruta 'a dog is under the granary'
is dog granary under [Driberg 1931:156]

For Majang, I use Cerulli [1948] and my own data [Unseth, in press]. The basic word order in Majang is also VSO: "L'ordine della frase: verbo + soggetto + oggetto, come nel Didinga," [Cerulli 1948:164], as seen in (10) and (11).

- (10) bʔokotuko daaki dʔepey 'Daaki killed a lion'
killed Daaki lion

- (11) dʃamko bʃokaye ʃar a cakoye 'Bokaye ate meat and tuber'
 he-ate Bokaye meat and tuber

Majang also uses postpositions, as seen in (12) and (13).

- (12) mɛlkaako atolay bis 'I came with Tolay'
 I-came Tolay with
- (13) kooko gidʃe raŋ 'a snake is on the rock'
 snake rock on

The following chart summarizes the usual patterns for some typologically relevant elements of the three languages. One note of clarification: like many Southern Surma languages, Didinga and Murle have a full system of subject suffixes but also a sporadic pattern of a kV- prefix in some paradigms.

	<u>Majang</u>	<u>Murle</u>	<u>Didinga</u>
Relative Clauses	follow	follow	follow
Adjectives	follow	follow	follow
Demonstratives	follow	follow	follow
Adverbs	follow	follow	follow
Question words	final	final	final
Subject affixes	suffixes	suffixes	suffixes
Derived forms	suffixes	suffixes	suffixes
Subordinate clauses	VSO & SVO	VSO	?
Genitives	follow	follow	follow
Possessive pronouns	follow	follow	follow
Case marking	suffixes	suffixes	suffixes

This paper has shown that at least three Surma languages, Didinga, Murle, and Majang, have VSO order and use postpositions. Didinga has both postpositions and prepositions, but "only [one] preposition worth mentioning" [Drierg 1931:151].

Since languages on both sides of the original binary split within Surma, i.e. Northern and Southern, have VSO order, it is reasonable to assume that Proto-Surma was VSO. Furthermore, since postpositions have been found in all documented Surma languages, it is safe to assume that Proto-Surma also had postpositions. This logically leads to the hypothesis that Proto-Surma itself was typologically anomalous, being VSO with postpositions.

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After this article had been typeset, I discovered Hawkins' [1983] discussion of word order universals. Like Greenberg, Hawkins has not found any example of a language that has the following traits: VSO order, postpositions, adjectives that follow nouns, and genitives that follow their head nouns, what Greenberg [1963:109] called Type 5. However, unlike Greenberg, though Hawkins has not found any examples of Type 5, he specifically allows the possibility that Type 5 languages may exist [1983:68]. Within Hawkins' framework, then, these Surma languages are not exceptions, but merely the first documented cases of a predictably rare type.

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Hawkins, John. 1983. *Word Order Universals*. New York: Academic Press.

