

“Flexibility” in Hittite word order: Subject position and discourse neutrality

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40 Years after Keenan 1976

Keenan's query

“In this paper I will attempt to provide a definition of the notion ‘subject of’ which will enable us to identify the subject phrase(s), if any, of any sentence in any language.” (p. 305)

*Towards a **Universal** Definition of “Subject”*

Universality?

Or rather, language specific?

cf. Dryer 1997, Croft 2001, Culicover & Jackendoff 2005,
Van Valin 2005, Bickel 2011

Word order

“b[asic]-subjects are normally the leftmost occurring NP in b[asic]-sentences.” (p. 319)

With exceptions due to: fixed word order and apparent “totally free” word order (pp. 319–320)

“Leftmost NP” and universality

Not the most definitive feature of subjecthood:

WALS (Dryer 2013):

Order of Subject, Object and Verb

SOV 565

SVO 488

VSO 95

VOS 25

OVS 11

OSV 4

No dominant order 189

How do we know when a sentence is basic?

And even SOV, SVO, and VSO orders are subject to word order manipulation—how do we know when the sentence is truly “basic”?

Keenan: “no mechanical procedure for identifying the set of b-sentences in a L[anguage]” (p. 309)

quantitative: “fewer parts”

qualitative: more “potential”, structurally and semantically unambiguous, ...

Applying a universal test to a specific language

The *position* is not universal, but rather language specific

The *test* could be universal, in that we can apply it across many Ls

Hittite: A case study

Ill-advised?

“Leaving aside word order, which in Hittite is largely free ...” (Luraghi 2010: 260)

“The functionally neutral or “unmarked” word order in Hittite is S(ubject) O(bject) V(erb). ... Various discourse factors not infrequently lead to deviations from the neutral S-O-V word order.” (Hoffner & Melchert 2008: 406)

Word order: A common but unfortunate view

“In English, in which there is little inflection, word-order is largely fixed. Thus the idea ‘Caesar conquered Pompey’ can be expressed only in this order (‘Pompey conquered Caesar’ would mean the opposite). In Latin, in which relations are largely expressed by inflection, there is no necessary order. Thus *Caesar Pompeium superāvit*, *Pompeium Caesar superāvit*, and *superāvit Pompeium Caesar* all tell the same fact, and differ only with regard to the emphasis placed upon one part or another.” (Hale / Buck 1903: 334)

And yet:

Caesar Pompeium superāvit (SOV)

Pompeium Caesar superāvit (OSV)

Superāvit Pompeium Caesar (VOS)

Caesar–Pompey, he conquered (SO[S]V)

Pompey, Caesar conquered (OSV)

Conquered Pompey, Caesar did (VOS[V])

And further yet:

Table 7.1 {S, O, V} ordering¹ (absolute numbers except in the case of Petronius)

	<i>SOV</i>	<i>SVO</i>	<i>OSV</i>	<i>OVS</i>	<i>VSO</i>	<i>VOS</i>
Cicero <i>Att.</i> 1	17	—	2	—	1	—
Caesar <i>Gall</i> 1–7+ <i>Civ.</i>	360	22	120	33	6	27
Vitruvius 1.1–4	7	4	2	1	—	—
Celsus 1–6	51	4	6	15	—	7
Petronius (in %)	46	19	15	6	6	6
Claudius Terentianus	3	10	1	1	1	4
<i>Passio Ss Scilitanorum</i>	1	1	—	—	—	—
<i>Peregrinatio</i> (1)	22	35	6	4	15	22
(2), 2nd part only	10	16	3	1	14	29
<i>Vulgata</i> (100 sentences)	15	8	—	—	—	—
* <i>Acta conv.</i> (direct speech)	2	—	—	4	2	—
*idem (reported speech)	2	1	1	1	—	1

* 2 sets each of 200 sentences

Defining “flexibility” and “rigidity” in word order

- (1) Type frequency: Number of word order instantiations
- (2) Token frequency: Frequency of word order instantiations
- (3) Neutrality: Number of word order instantiations free from discourse manipulation

Type frequency

Even English can instantiate more than one word order

Possible instantiations might be limited (quantitatively and pragmatically)

Hittite word order types

S

nu maḥḥa[n] LÚ.MEŠ NÍ.Z[U] ŠA LÚKÚR
CONN as thief of enemy

O

V

ūrki-n uw-anzi
wheel-ACC.SG see-3PL.PRS.ACT

‘And as the thieves of the enemy see the wheel’ (NH KUB
13.2 i 5-6)

Hittite word order types

O

13 PA

13 measure

KUNAŠU

emmer

S

^mḪatipa-LÚ

Ḫatipaziti

V

^mNarapiduwa

Narapiduwa

ḫar-zi

keep/hold-3SG.PRS.ACT

‘It is 13 measures of emmer Ḫatipaziti keeps in the city of Narapiduwa.’ (MH HKM 11: 5-6)

Hittite word order types

V

O

kuen-zi=ma=an

kill-3SG.PRS.ACT=PCLE=3SG.ACC

V

O

ḫuišnu-ziy=a[n

keep.alive-3SG.PRS.ACT=3SG.ACC

S

LUGAL-uš

king-NOM.SG

S

LUGAL-u]š

king-NOM.SG

‘But the king kills him [or] the king spares him (lit. keeps him alive).’

Token frequency

Too much variation:

“... it is even difficult to conclude that Latin was a verb-final language at the classical period, let alone conclude that Latin at that period was an SOV language.” (Pinkster 1990: 71)

Not enough data:

Hittite sentences with full NPs in short supply

“ ... sentences of the type *Dog bites man* are extremely rare” in Latin, p. 72

Neutrality

With caution:

“The existence of so much variation itself in our texts should warn us against assuming a syntactic basic order. The variation can be explained much better if we assume the existence of several different orders reserved for specific situations ...” (Pinkster 1990: 71)

Hittite: neutrality = lack of topicalization, contrastive focus;
lack of prosodic effects

... or at least: compare the same types of sentences

Nominative - Accusative

S

O

V

[^mM]uwattali-š

^mḤuzzia-n

kuen-ta

Muwatalli-NOM.SG Ḥuzziya-ACC.SG kill-3SG.PRT.ACT

‘[M]uwatalli killed Ḥuzziya.’ (MH KBo 16.25 iv 15)

No pragmatic deviations

O

nu ēšhar

CONN blood.NOM/ACC.SG.N

S

LUGAL-u-š

king-NOM.SG

V

auš-ta

see-3SG

‘And **it was the blood** the king saw.’ (OH/NS KBo 3.34 i
22)

Focus construction:

The king asked: ‘Why are their garments and waistbands not blood-stained?’

The guards replied: ‘Their cloaks are wrapped (around them).’ They unwrapped the garments and **the blood** saw the king.

Wackernagel deviations

S (O)

LUGAL-š=an=kan

king-NOM.SG=3SG.ACC=PCL

‘The king kill[s] him.’ (MH KBo 13.31 ii 9)

V

kuen[-zi]

kill-3SG.PRS.ACT

(O)

mān=an=kan

if=3SG.ACC=PCL

‘If Ashkaliya kills him ...’ (OH/NS KBo 3.34 ii 17)

S

^mĀškaliyaš

Aškaliya.NOM.SG

V

kuyen-zi

kill-3SG.PRS.ACT

V (O)

kuen-zi=ma=an

kill-3SG=PCLE=3SG.ACC

‘But the king kills him [or] the king spares him (lit. keeps him alive).’

(OH/NS KBo 6.26 iii 21-22)

S

LUGAL-uš

king-NOM.SG

Transitive Nom – Acc

‘carry’

S

nu ^mKišba[pili]-š

CONN Kisbapili-NOM.SG

O

ÉRIN^{MEŠ}-an URU_Hinduwa

army-ACC.SG Hinduwa

V

zaḥḥiy-a peḥute-t

battle-DIR lead-3SG.PRT.ACT

‘And Kishba[pili] led the army to the city of Hinduwa to battle.’ (MH KUB 14.1 obv. 68)

Transitive Nom - Acc

‘bring’

S

karū mŪḥna-š

LUGAL

URUZālpuwa

O

DINGIRŠiušumm[in]

prev. Uḥna-NOM.SG

king

Zalpuwa

Siusummi-ACC.SG

V

[UR]UNēša-z

URUZālpuwa

pēd[a-š]

Nesa-ABL.SG

Zalpuwa

bring-3SG.PRT.ACT

Previously, Uḥna, king of Zalpuwa, had brough[t] the deity

Shiushumm[i] from Nesa to Zalpuwa.’ (OS KBo 3.22 obv. 39-41)

Transitive Nom - Acc

‘see’

S

nu LÚar[a-š]

CONN friend-NOM.SG

O

LÚara-n

friend-ACC.SG

le

NEG

V

auš-zi

see-3SG.PRS.ACT

‘And on[e] (lit. friend) shall not see the other.’ (MH/NS KBo 6.34 i
20-21)

Transitive Nom - Acc

'kill'

S

ŠEŠ[-a-š=ma[?]=wa=za=kan]

brother-NOM.SG=but[?]=QUOT=PCL=PCL

O

ŠEŠ-a-n

brother-ACC.SG

V

kuen-du

kill-3SG.IPV.ACT

'[But[?]] the brother shall kill the brother.' (NH KBo 4.4 ii 12)

SOV, or ...

Finding examples of SOV != determining neutral word order as SOV

However, all encountered examples of non-SOV are in some way contextual

For example: OSV

	O	S
našma=wa=kan	LÚKÚR	ap-ūš
or=QUOT=PCL	enemy	DEM-NOM/ACC.PL

V

kun-andu

kill-3PL.IPV.ACT

‘ ... or they shall kill the enemy’ (NH KBo 5.4 rev. 31)

Fuller context: contrastive focus

	S	O	V
[n]aššu=wa=kan	LÚKÚR	ap-ūš	kuin-du
either=QUOT=PCL	enemy	DEM-NOM/ACC.PL	kill-3SG
	O	S	V
našma=wa=kan	LÚKÚR	ap-ūš	kun-andu
or=QUOT=PCL	enemy	DEM-NOM/ACC.PL	kill-3PL
‘Either the enemy shall kill them or they shall kill the enemy.’ (NH KBo 5.4 rev. 31)			

Now what?

Examples here (and in the fuller paper) establish neutral order of SOV.

But these S's and O's are Nom's and Acc's, respectively.
What about dative(/accusative) elements?

- ... recipients
- ... possessors
- ... experiencers

Dative possessors

Hock (1990: 125): possessor-subjects as having clear subject properties—as beneficiaries, most animate, agentive, and “affected” participant ... just like dative experiencers

Dative possessors + Dative experiencers = Dative subjects

1. Establish canonical position of dative recipients
2. Establish canonical position of dative possessors and experiencers
3. Compare – establish larger category of dative subjects?

Dative recipients in neutral sentences: post-S

S O IO V

- DINGIR^{Š/}UTU=wa ŠU-an **ANA DUMU.NITA** pāi (KUB 14.3 ii 29-30)
‘My majesty gives (his) hand to (his) son’ (NH KUB 14.3 ii 29-30)
- LÚSAGI NINDA takarmun **[LU]GAL-i** pāi (KBo 23.64 iii 9-10)
‘The cupbearer gives the takarmu-bread to the [ki]ng.’ (MH KBo 23.64 iii 9-10)

S IO O V

- [(LUGAL-uš **AM**)]A 20 LÚ^{MEŠ} ŠUKUR 5 MA.NA KÙ.BABBAR pāi (KBo 21.25 i 49 + KUB 34.123 i 18-19 || KUB 43.26 i 6-7)
‘The king gives 5 minas of silver to the 20 spear-men.’
- DUMU^{MEŠ}.É.GAL **LUGAL-i** ŠU^{MEŠ}-aš wātar piyanzi (KUB 20.85 i 7)
‘The palace servants gave the king, into (his) hands water.’

Dative possessors: more S than recipient

[k(ezza=ma	maḥḥ)an	(ANA	^{S_{Dat}} ŠEŠ=YA
therefore=but	as	to	brother=POSS.1SG
	“O”		V

ḥuiḥuiššuwaliiš)]	DUMU-aš	[(ŪL)	ēš-t(a)]
legitimate	son-NOM.SG	not.yet	be-3SG.PRT

‘But therefore, as my brother did not yet have a legitimate son.’ (NH KUB 1.1 iii 40-41 and duplicates)

Dative possessors: more S than recipient

S_{Dat}

ammuk=ma=an=wa

1SG.OBL=but=PCL=QUOT when/if

V

ēš-ta

be-3SG.PRT

‘If I had a (lit. my) son...’ (NH KBo 5.6 iii 53-54)

“O”

DUMU=YA

son=POSS.1SG

Dative possessors: more S than recipient

	S _{Dat}		“O”		
<i>ANA</i>	ŠEŠ=YA		MUNUS ^{TUM}	ŪL	imma
to	brother=POSS.1SG	wife		not	in.fact
V					

ē[s]-ta

be-3SG.PRT

‘Did my brother not in fact have a wife?’ (NH KUB 21.38
obv. 53)

Dative possessors: more S than recipient

This and other examples points to Dative initial order for possessive constructions

Dative possessors behave like nominative subjects with respect to order

Dative experiencers: more S than recipient

S_{Dat}

nu ammuqq=a
CONN 1SG.OBL=CONN

V

kattawatar
complaint-NOM/ACC.SG

‘And if I complained of that matter ...’

O

apā-t uttar
that-NOM/ACC matter.NOM/ACC.SG

kiš-at
become-3SG.PRT

Dative experiencers: more S than recipient

S_{Dat}

mān URUḪattuši

if Hattusa-DAT/LOC

šalli-š

great-NOM.SG

O

waštai-š

misfortune-NOM.SG

V

kišari

happen-3SG.PRS.M

‘If Ḫattusha experiences a great misfortune’

Dative experiences: More S than recipient

S_{Dat}

nu ANA EN=ŠU

CONN to master/lord=POSS.3SG

O

ZI-an-za

wish-NOM

V

waršiya-zzi

be.satisfied-3SG.PRS.ACT

‘And my master is granted his wish.’

Dative experiencers and dative possessors

- ... function alike with regard to their position
- ... do not function like recipients, syntactically (with respect to word order) or semantically
- ... but they do share position properties with nominative subjects

Conclusions

Flexibility in word order—is word order or “flexibility” the myth?

Nonetheless, when we analyze *comparable sentences* with discourse neutrality we find dative possessors and dative experiencers are in initial position, while dative recipients follow the nominative subject.

A somewhat temperamental but reliable test for subjecthood?

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