

The Role of Subjects in the VO/OV Dichotomy

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Topic, Focus and Subject

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VO and OV languages

Typical properties of VO and OV languages:

VO languages	OV languages
Noun-Genitive order	Genitive-Noun order
Prepositions	Postpositions
No ergative alignment	Ergative alignment possible
No scrambling	Scrambling
Superiority effects	No superiority effects

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→ **Harmony in head-dependent order (typological correlations; Biberauer & Sheehan, 2013)**

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→ **Surface properties beyond head-dependent order (typological correlations; Dixon, 2010)**

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→ Harmony in head-dependent order (typological correlations; Biberauer & Sheehan, 2013)

→ Surface properties beyond head-dependent order (typological correlations; Dixon, 2010)

→ **Properties based on assumptions about underlying structures. Here specifically: SVO ↔ +EPP (Haider, 2013)**

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Czech is a VO language:

- V-O as neutral order, O-V only non-neutral (Šimík & Jasinskaja, 2022)
- No intervening adverbs and obliques (Neeleman, 2015; Hawkins, 2008)
- V-O order in VP fronting:

(1) Context: *Who will send him roses?*

- Posílat růže mu bude Markéta.
send.INF roses him will.3SG Markéta
'Markéta will send him roses.'
- *Růže posílat mu bude Markéta.
roses send.INF him will.3SG Markéta

But Czech, like most Slavic languages, has notoriously free word order. Example 2 shows that reordering need not involve A-bar-movement: the reordering of S and O extends the binding domain of the possessive.

- (2) a. Myslím, že jeho_{2/*1} matka miluje každého člověka₁.
think.1SG COMP his mother.NOM love.3SG every.ACC person.ACC
Only: 'I believe that his mother loves every person.'
- b. Myslím, že každého člověka₁ miluje jeho_{2/1} matka.
think.1SG COMP every.ACC person.ACC love.3SG his mother.NOM
Additionally: 'For every person: I believe that his mother loves him.'

Contrast this with A-bar-movement of an interrogative object:

- (3) Koho₁ zradila za války dokonce i jeho_{2/*1} matka?
who.ACC betray.PTCP during war.GEN even even his mother.NOM
'Who was even betrayed by his mother after the war?'

⇒ Czech A-bar-movement does not extend binding domains, but the movement of O before S in example 2 does, which suggests that it is **A-scrambling**.

So how do the facts that Czech is VO and that it has scrambling fit together? Is Czech some kind of exception?

→ We argue that scrambling is not dependent on OV-ness through $SVO \leftrightarrow +EPP$.

Instead, the EPP is independent of OV/VO-ness.

Independent EPP parameter:

“Languages differ as to whether the subject must occupy the specifier position of a functional projection” (Fanselow, 2020).

Predictions for Czech (VO, but –EPP):

- A-scrambling available
- No superiority effects
- No extraction asymmetries
- Low subjects possible

→ These are partly properties that feature in the discussion of whether Slavic languages, including Czech, are VO languages or not (Haider & Szucsich, 2022).

In line with Häussler, Fanselow, Eythórsson, Šimík and Vicente (n.d.), our questionnaire finds that reordering of interrogative arguments is grammatical in Czech:

- (4) a. Kdo co donesl?
who.NOM what bring.PTCP
- b. Co kdo donesl?
what who.NOM bring.PTCP
'Who brought what?'

Extraction asymmetries

Czech appears to display subject islands, whilst extraction out of objects is fine:

- (5) a. **Co** řekl Honza, že koupila __?
what say.PTCP Honza COMP buy.PTCP
'What did Honza say that she bought?'
- b. **O čem** si koupila knížku __?
about what REFL buy.PTCP book.ACC
'About what did she buy herself a book?'
- c. ***Co**, že si Lucie koupila __, se ti líbilo?
what COMP REFL Lucie buy.PTCP REFL you.DAT please.PTCP
Intended: 'What did you like that Lucie bought herself?'
- d. ***O čem** knížka __ vyšla?
about what book.NOM appear.PTCP
Intended: 'About what did a book appear?'

Extraction asymmetries

But: In line with the findings of Sturgeon et al. (2010), extraction from subjects becomes much better when these are postverbal:

- (6) a. ?**Co** se ti líbilo, že si Lucie koupila __?
what REFL you.DAT please.PTCP COMP REFL Lucie buy.PTCP
'What did you like that Lucie bought herself?'
- b. **O** čem vyšla knížka __?
about what appear.PTCP book.NOM
'About what did a book appear?'

⇒ The contrast seems to be contingent on topicality, not on subject vs. object: movement leads to a freezing effect.

On the other hand, extraction from unaccusatives is better than from unergatives and transitives. Is this for structural reasons or due to accessibility?

With psych verbs¹, V-S orders are preferred, though S-V orders are always possible as well:

(7) Context: *What's new?*

- a. Mému otci se líbí **auto**.
my.DAT father.DAT REFL appeal.3SG car.NOM
- b. **Auto** se líbí mému otci.
car.NOM REFL appeal.3SG my.DAT father.DAT

¹We use psych verbs because they make low subjects more easily available (Temme, 2018), giving them the best chance possible – this will become relevant for Amharic.

Let us look at the predictions we made earlier:

- A-scrambling available
- No superiority effects
- No extraction asymmetries
- Low subjects possible

Czech shows that **VO languages do not need to have the EPP**. It thus also shows that **the EPP is not universal**.

In consequence, the generalisation **SVO \leftrightarrow +EPP does not hold**.
What about a weaker variant, **SOV \rightarrow -EPP**?

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Amharic is an OV language. OV is the neutral order, other orders are illicit in an all-new-context:²

(8) a. Context: *What has happened?*

abbat-e addis məkina gəzz-a
father-1S.POSS new car buy.PFV-3SM.SUB
'My father bought a new car.'

b. #abbat-e gəzz-a addis məkina
father-1S.POSS buy.PFV-3SM.SUB new car

²We would like to thank Wakweya Gobena for providing us with the Amharic data and for discussing it with us.

Does Amharic have scrambling? First observation: OS order can occur in Amharic in the right information-structural setting:

- (9) a. Context: *Who bought a new car?*

abbat-e addis məkina gəzz-a
father-1S.POSS new car buy.PFV-3SM.SUB
'MY FATHER bought a new car.'

- b. Context: *What did your father buy?*

addis-u-n **məkina** abbat-e gəzz-a
new-DEF-ACC car father-1S.POSS buy.PFV-3SM.SUB
'My father bought a NEW CAR.'

Is that A-scrambling? Or is it A-bar-movement of the focused object?

“**A-scrambling** refers to clause-bound word order variation in which the fronted element is not information-structurally marked” (Pregla, to appear).

In Amharic word order variation, the fronted element is prosodically and information-structurally marked (Pregla, to appear).

⇒ This hints toward it not being A-scrambling.

As in Czech, if there is A-scrambling, reordering should extend the binding domain. When we compare 10a and 10b, both are possible with the intended meaning, i. e. we find reconstruction:

- (10) a. ijmandanu səw jə-ras-u-n innat indəmmi-wedd
every man POSS-own-3SM.POSS-ACC mother that-love.IPFV
amn-allə-əhu
believe.IPFV-AUX.NPST-1S.SUB
- b. jə-ras-u-n innat ijmandanu səw indəmmi-wedd
POSS-own-3SM.POSS-ACC mother every man that-LOVE.IPFV
amn-allə-əhu
believe.IPFV-AUX.NPST-1S.SUB
'I believe that every man loves his (own) mother.'

If we want the object to bind the subject, this is only achievable through A-bar-topicalisation of the object, which triggers object marking on the verb:

- (11) a. *ijjandanu-n səw jə-ras-u innat indəmmit-wedd-*(əw)*
every-ACC man POSS-own-3SM.POSS mother that-love.IPFV-3SF.OBJ
amn-allə-əhu
believe.IPFV-AUX.NPST-1S.SUB
'For every person: I believe that his mother loves him.'
- b. **jə-ras-u innat ijandanu-n səw indəmmit-wedd-əw*
POSS-own-3SM.POSS mother every-ACC man that-love.IPFV-3SF.OBJ
amn-allə-əhu
believe.IPFV-AUX.NPST-1S.SUB

→ Baker (2012): Amharic OS order does not involve A-scrambling because the binding domain is not extended.

Predictions for Amharic (OV, but +EPP):

- No A-scrambling
- Superiority effects
- Extraction asymmetries
- No low subjects

Reordering of interrogative arguments leads to ungrammaticality:³

- (12) a. man min amət't'-a
who what bring.PFV-3SM.SUB
'Who said what?'
- b. *min man amət't'-a
what who bring.PFV-3SM.SUB

However, since Amharic does not front interrogative phrases anyway, this result is expected, and superiority effects cannot be tested for.

³Also when the object interrogative carries case marking.

In Amharic, neither interrogative extractions nor extractions of contrastive foci appear to work.

13 is possible, but *book* appears to be an afterthought – note that the sentence would also be grammatical without *book* if it has been mentioned in the discourse.

- (13) **jə-man-in** gəzz-attf aster _ məs'ihaf
 POSS-who-ACC buy.PFV-3SF.SUB Aster book
 ‘Whose book did Aster buy?’

In contrast, with extraction from subjects, such a construction is not available, not even with an afterthought reading:

- (14) a. ***jə-mann** tinant _ wuffa tf'oh-e
 POSS-who yesterday dog bark.PFV-3SM.SUB
- b. ***jə-mann** (tinant) tf'oh-e _ wuffa
 POSS-who yesterday bark.PFV-3SM.SUB dog
 Intended: 'Whose dog barked yesterday?'

But the asymmetry is not one of extraction: In 14, *dog* can never be left out, so an afterthought reading would not be available anyway.⁴

⁴And in general, a cleft construction is preferred to what we see in 14.

Unlike in Czech (example 7), the kind of psych verb constructions that could make low subjects available do not exist in Amharic. Instead, a causative construction is used, with S-O-V as the neutral order.

We do not find low subjects with any other verb type, such as unaccusatives. However, we are not sure how to deal with this absence of evidence when the critical case is not applicable.

Let us look at the predictions we made earlier:

- No A-scrambling
- Superiority effects NA
- Extraction asymmetries NA?
- No low subjects NA?

Amharic might be among those seemingly untypical **OV** languages that have the **EPP**.

Combined with what we have seen for Czech, this could mean that neither **SVO** \rightarrow **+EPP** nor **SOV** \rightarrow **-EPP** are correct.

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Language overview

	[-V _{FINAL}]	[+V _{FINAL}]
[-EPP]	Czech, Polish (Slavic) Spanish, Italian (Romance)	Marathi (Indo-Aryan) Mongolian (Mongolic) Gagauz, Kazakh, Turkish (Turk) Linxia (Sinitic) Japanese (Japonic) German (Germanic) South Bolivian Quechua (Quechua)
[+EPP]	English (Germanic) Thai (Kra-Dai) Vietnamese (Austroasiatic) Mandarin (Sinitic) Bwamu (Gur)	Nepali (Indo-Aryan) Amharic (Semitic) South Sámi (Uralic) Korean (Koreanic) Afrikaans (Germanic) Jula (Mande)

Conclusions

- By combining generative and typological approaches (Baker, 2015), we conclude that the EPP is not a universal property, and that it is not dependent on any other property.
- Head directionality and the EPP are thus two independent potential macro-parameters. We think it is worthwhile to search for macro-parametric variation in addition to micro-parameters (Baker, 2008).
- Whilst the EPP can be researched cross-linguistically, not all diagnostics can be applied to all languages:
 - Extraction asymmetries → availability of extractions (& difficult interpretation)
 - Superiority effects → fronting of interrogatives
 - Low subjects → psych verb constructions
- Also, one needs to clarify the role of the EPP in ergative languages.

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Thank you for your attention!

We are looking forward to your questions and comments!

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