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Tunen syntax and information structure

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This thesis investigates the interaction between syntax and information structure in Tunen, a Bantu language spoken in Cameroon by approximately 70,000-100,000 people. Tunen has previously been noted to be unusual for a Bantu language in several respects, being the only one of the 550-some Bantu languages reported to have subject-object-verb (SOV) rather than subject-verb-object (SVO) basic word order. As previous work suggested that Tunen's unusual syntax relates to information structure, this thesis serves to test this relationship. The principal data source comes from fieldwork conducted by the author in Ndikiniméki/Yaoundé, Cameroon, with supplementary evidence from secondary sources and remote elicitation.

The results indicate that Tunen syntax shows less influence from information structure than expected from previous work on the language and the surrounding languages. Instead, Tunen's basic word order is shown to be consistent across discourse contexts, clause types, and object types. Alongside discussion of the SOV word order, the thesis investigates the means available for expressing information structure and the syntax of a typologically-unusual discontinuous DP construction, which is shown to be found across information-structural contexts. A first formal analysis of Tunen syntax is provided, drawing up a synchronic and diachronic account within the framework of generative syntax. The thesis also includes an updated grammatical overview of the language and sample texts.

As a detailed study of the relationship between syntax and information structure in a typologically-unusual language, this thesis is of interest to researchers in the fields of Bantu linguistics, Niger-Congo studies, theoretical syntax, and linguistic typology.

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