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Tunen syntax and information structure

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STELLINGEN
behorend bij het proefschrift
Tunen syntax and information structure
te verdedigen op woensdag 4 september 2024
klokke 16:00 uur
aan de Universiteit Leiden
door Elisabeth J. Kerr

1. Tunen does not have a synchronic word order alternation between SOV for given objects and SVO for focal objects (*contra* Mous 1997, 2003; Güldemann 2007). Instead, SOV (specifically S-Aux-O-V-X) is the basic word order, found consistently across information-structural contexts, TAM contexts, object types, and clause types.
2. The Tunen marker *á* is not a contrast marker (*contra* Mous 1997, 2003), nor a generalised focus marker. *á* functions synchronically as the affirmative specificational/identificational copula, found in non-verbal predication and in biclausal cleft constructions used for focus expression.
3. Tunen numerals and quantifiers are commonly discontinuously positioned with respect to the head noun, appearing in a typologically unusual S-O-V-Mod construction that challenges the Contiguity Principle (Fanselow & Cavar 2002) due to its consistency across information-structural contexts.
4. Object referents that are accessible are commonly zero-expressed in Tunen, with no object marking or transitivity-changing morphology on the verb. This fits into a broader areal tendency of non-expression of given objects in Northwestern Bantu/non-Bantu Bantoid.
5. The basic clausal syntax of Tunen is more accurately modelled in the generative framework by an analysis with verbal head movement + object movement than an analysis with progressive roll-up movement or one relying on base-generation of OV order.

6. Tunen's underlying clausal syntax is structurally very similar to that of Narrow Bantu languages with VO basic word order, with the changes understandable as language-internal developments that arose independently of the 'S-Aux-O-V-X' word order patterns found in West Africa.
7. Downstep makes lexical and grammatical contrasts in Tunen, and so not marking it orthographically leads to a loss of linguistically-relevant information.
8. Many languages' word orders would be more accurately described when using discourse roles rather than, or in addition to, grammatical roles. This requires a conceptual shift in approaches to both word order typology and formal modelling.
9. Linguistic data – including data from elicitation – should be presented as far as possible with the discourse context. Linguistic transcription tools should be updated to include a “Context” field to prompt more researchers to include this in their work.
10. “Theoretical linguistics vs. descriptive linguistics” is a false dichotomy.
11. Sometimes it is not a difference in what a theory does, but what the theory makes you do in your research, that makes that theory more valuable than another.
12. Inclusion that requires total assimilation is not inclusion; true inclusion requires change from both sides (even if asymmetric).

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