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S-Aux-O-V-Other in Africa: Typological and areal perspective

Part I: Methodological and conceptual issues

A. Defining what we're looking at: the Prototype
— The syntax-level structure: S-Aux-O-V-Other (= S-Aux-O-V-X)
— Aux: a *closed* class of elements expressing inflectional-type
  (not derivational) grammatical categories: notably Tense,
  Aspect, Mood, Negation (others on a language-specific basis)
  • Aux is not an affix, but a separate word (or at worst a clitic)
— V: an *open* class of elements expressing typical verbal semantics
  (activities, processes, states, etc.)
— O: a single object
— Other: all other sentence arguments and adjuncts except S, O

B. This deliberately leaves open the question of the language-specific grammatical
  nature of Aux and V
— Aux may be clearly verbal, clearly non-verbal, or unclear
— Verb may be clearly finite, clearly non-finite (incl. verbal-noun), or unclear

— One possible perspective: deliberately lump all these sub-types together
— Rationale: the phenomenon is more robust than analyses of it
— Framing the issue in this way allows a syntactic "signature"-feature of
  (many) African languages to emerge

C. What is "split" in a split predication? The split is several splits at once:
  1. Syntagmatic split:
    (a) s-AUX-obj-VERB-other   (split predicational nucleus = {Aux,V})
    (b) s-aux-OBJ-verb-OTHER   (split set of verbal actants = {Obj,Other})
    — One could then focus on either split, *separately*:
    (a) Would then include: s-AUX-obj-other-VERB   (true verb-final)
    (b) Would then include: s-OBJ-verb-OTHER   (no Aux)

  2. Paradigmatic split:
    (c) "Split" in the sense of possible cooccurrence with other construction types:
        notably S-(Aux)-V-O (for this sense of "split" cf. e.g. "split ergativity")

D. Constructions which "almost" are S-Aux-O-V-Other

  1. Instances where [S-Aux] is fused, yielding multiple sets of Subj Pronouns
    — Straddles the border between S-Aux-O-V-Other and S-O-V-Other
    — Such fusion very common in Africa (e.g. Hausa); relevant case: Mende
  2. S-Aux-O-V#   (i.e. true verb-final)
    — Thus in !Ora (ex. (1))
  3. Situation found in Dinka (W. Nilotic)
    — The apparent "S-Aux-O-V-Other" is really Topic-Aux-(S)-(O)-V-Other
      (Andersen 1991:278); "Topic" often = fronted S(ubject) (ex. (2))

Part II: S-Aux-O-V-Other in global perspective

A. The syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other is an Africa-specific *quirk*
      — Common in Africa; but apparently not found anywhere else in the world
         (except as minor stylistic option, e.g. in German or Luiseño)
      — For an Africanist, it's perfectly normal part of syntax
      — For non-Africanists and/or typologists, it's unprecedented; violates
         the otherwise robust generalization that "OV" means (preferentially) V-*final*

      — We'll discuss why/how the construction can arise language-internally,
         and apparently several times independently, in Africa
      — But the puzzle (unresolved) remains: why *only* in Africa?

B. One natural path of evolution that has been proposed: a language with the word-order
  profile "SVO & Gen-N" should have the optimal configuration for generating
  S-Aux-O-V-Other via grammaticalization (Noun periphrasis)
      — This does indeed occur frequently in Africa; but outside of Africa?

      — Typological check, based on Matthew Dryer's worldwide database (p.c.)
      — The type "SVO & GN", though uncommon, is not super-rare
      — Dryer mentions 90 such languages (out of 823), of which 66 are
         outside Africa; checked some 25 of these
         — Indo-European: Danish, Swedish; Latvian, Lithuanian; Kashmiri
         — Sino-Tibetan: Kayah Li (Karen), Hmong Njua
         — Mon-Khmer: Minor Mlabri
         — Central Malayo-Polynesian: Nuaulu, Tetun Dili
         — Other Austronesian: Taba, Ambai
         — New Guinea: Abun, Hatam, Tidore, Sahu, Warembori, Arapesh
         — Australia: Tiwi, Maung, Yukulta, Yindjibarndi
         — South America: Guaraní, Mosetén, Lokono Dian (Arawak)

      — None of these have S-Aux-O-V-Other; few of them have anything like it
         — Closest is Kashmiri, with S-Aux-O-V# (flexible V-final);
           a V2-language (like German), with Helping-Verb as "Aux"
      — Factors which can lead to this non-occurrence:
         — Absence of non-finite verb forms (hence no VerbNoun)
         — Different word-order for main and dependent clauses (SOV subordinate)
         — Two co-existing genitive word-orders
         — Periphrastic constructions formed with e.g. Participles, but not VerbNoun
         — Language-internal factors leading to Aux in other positions

C. The two syntagmatic "subsplits" (above) do exist outside of Africa, but rare

  1. Languages having O-V-Other (without Aux)
     — Dryer (p.c.; and cf. Gensler/Dryer forthcoming) mentions the following:
       • Semitic: Neo-Aramaic (Arbel)
       • New Guinea: Kairiru, Gumawana, Vanimo
       • Australia: Murinypata, Gunwinggu, Mayali, Ungarinjin, Djapu,
         Yidiny, Diyari
       • North America: Yupik Eskimo (Siberian), Koasati (Muskogean)
       • South America: Bribri, Guaymi, Epena Pedee, Siriono, Carib, Apalai,
         Hixkaryana; also Karo (Tupi) (Dryer, p.c.)

— Gensler (1994:7) mentions the Akkadian dialect spoken at Ugarit
— Blansitt (1986:32) mentions a few other languages that "unquestionably" have
    S-O-V-Dat word order
   • North/South America: Tarahumara, Bokota, Munduruku

— But most of these seem to involve stylistic preferences; seldom a firm grammatical
    pattern, of the type seen in (most) African S-Aux-O-V-Other languages

  2. S-Aux-O-V# (verb-final)
    — Seems surprisingly rare; German and Kashmiri in subordinate clauses
    — And the South American language Canelo-Krahó (Dryer, p.c.)

Part III: Distribution in Africa
    — See Data sheet, Tables 1-2 and Map

Part IV: Modes of explanations for presence of S-Aux-O-V-X

A. Overview: approaches to explanation
    (1) systemic-functional
    (2) historical: a) genealogical;   b) areal
    — Not meant to be mutually exclusive; no diachronic monocausality (a conceptual error)
    — Multiple factors can be (and probably typically are) at work together; relevant both for:
      a) The emergence of the feature in an individual language
      b) The distribution of the feature in a geographical area (e.g., Africa as a whole)

B. Functional motivation
  (1) Grammaticalization
    — 2 scenarios (Claudi 1993, Heine and Claudi 2001)

    a) Periphrasis involving nominalized complement: V [Gen VN] X   > Aux O V X
    b) Verb serialization: V   O V   X   > Aux O V X
    — (Will not provide extensive exemplification here; sufficiently familiar to this audience)
    — Accounts for a number of language-specific cases (e.g., in Kwa, Moru-Mangbetu, Ju)

    — Looking at phenomenon only from this perspective still runs into problems in many cases
    — Factual problems:

    a) V-O often not coupled with G-N, but with N-G; and/or, languages with no verb
      serialization: Atlantic, Benue-Congo, (?some) Adamawa-Ubangi, S. Cushitic (cf. Table 1)

    b) Even in many GN-languages, explicitly no genitive involved; rather, preposed
      non-genitive complements of nominalizations (akin to incorporation,
      cf. German, Fongbe (ex. (13)))
      — Hence a third grammaticalization scenario: V [O VN] X   > Aux O V X

    c) Coexistent V-O&O-V pattern (Legbo (Cross River, Hyman p.c.), Ibibio (ex. (3)))
      and/or coexistent Aux-V-O&Aux-O-V patterns (Aghem (ex. 4)), Igbo (10),
      Bafut (12)): here auxiliation cannot (without further assumptions, see following
      "methodological problem") be the triggering factor

— Methodological problem: sometimes requires one to posit that generalization
    of the pattern and/or analogy have erased all traces of earlier grammaticalization

— Validity of grammaticalization in some cases does not exclude other
    explanations, even within the same language ("multiple causation")
— No a priori reason why the marked word order should be an entirely unitary
    phenomenon and thus should have a single explanation for all its attested cases

(2) Information structure
    — Two important facts from Tables 1 and 2:

a) Regular co-present alternative S-(Aux)-V-O
    — All but Mande, Senufo, (East Songhay), (?Iraqw)
    — For most of these groups, original/dominant V-O reconstructible; V-O > O-V
       shift widely accepted (Heine 1980, Manfredi 1997; pace Marchese and others)
b) S-Aux-O-V order is mostly not general, but conditioned
    — All but Mande, Senufo, (Songhay)
    — At first glance, conditioning factors look heterogeneous, but see below
    — In many of the languages concerned, the postverbal position is both the
       unmarked position for the object (> V-O pattern) and the unmarked
       position for assertive constituent/term focus
    — Object placed in "unusual" position in contexts where it is not the
       (exclusive) clause focus

— Observed context restrictions/conditioning for S-Aux-O-V-X:
    a) Explicitly involves information structure: Aghem (ex. (4)), Burunge (6), Tunen (5)
      (exceptional pattern)
    b) More subtle cases: Nupe (11), Igbo (10)
    c) Pronominal Obj or definite Obj: anaphoric pronoun or definite Obj mostly implies
      discourse-*given* participant > object is extrafocal (cf. pronoun clitic
      placement in Romance): Kana (8), Akan (9)
    d) Negation > inherent focus on NEG: Marchese 1983, Heine and Reh 1983,
      Hyman and Watters 1984, Güldemann 1996, 1999
      — Cf. also Aux-independent SVO>SOV in negation: Mursi and Me'en (Surmic,
        Unseth 1986); Legbo (Cross River, Hyman p.c.), Bafut (ex. (12))
    e) Progressive > inherent focus on the aspectual feature: Hyman and
      Watters 1984, Manfredi 1997, Güldemann 2003; thus Fongbe (ex. (13))
      — Frequent development to wider Imperfective
    f) ?Auxiliary periphrases in general may show tendency to focus on the
      auxiliary category and defocus participants > possible generalization
      of a pattern

— Hypothesis for (original) word order alternation regarding object:
        • V-O: object is the assertive focus
        • O-V: object is defocused or at least less salient than postverbal object
    — Potentially relevant for all groups but Mande, Senufo, Songhay
    — Explanation of V-O ~ O-V shift in terms of alternating information
      structure; includes (in a sense) the three grammaticalization scenarios

— Heine and Claudi (2001: 43) go so far to claim that "the presence of type B [involving
    the word order S-Aux-O-V-X] in different African languages is neither a matter of
    common origin (= genetic relationship) nor of language contact (= areal relationship)"

— We propose that historical explanations *are* relevant
— Basic fact to keep in mind: S-Aux-O-V-X is a quirk
— When a quirk shows up in two languages (or language groups) which
    are already known to have some historical connection, then totally
    independent parallel genesis is maximally unlikely
       — Hence: genealogical or areal factors at play, if/where plausible

C. Genealogical inheritance

1. Where pattern pervades the entire group, merits reconstruction (cf. Table 2)
       — Mande, Senufo branch of Gur, Kru
       — Possibly Songhay; loss in westernmost Koyra and Djenne Chiini (but see below)
       — Arguably for Niger-Congo as a whole (Gensler 1994, 1997)

2. But be careful of over-generalization; refinement of available reconstructions:
  (a) Proto-Bantu
       — Reconstruct S-AUX-O-V-X pattern, but only with PRONOUN object
          — Tunen presumably not relevant, since not Narrow Bantu
          — Comparable to attested languages: Gola (ex. (7)), Kana (ex. (8))

  (b) "Narrow" Niger-Congo
       — Concept of "Narrow" Niger-Congo excludes controversial members like
         Mande, Dogon, Ijoid, ?Kordofanian, ?parts or whole of Atlantic
       — Remaining families: Benue-Congo, Kwa, Gur, Kru, Adamawa-Ubangi
       — These are the families where O-V is controlled by contextual conditioning
       — Reconstruct optional S-(Aux)-O-V-X alongside dominant S-(Aux)-V-O-X,
         where the first in some way defocuses the object

3. There are families where such a reconstruction is not feasible; but these are now
  excluded, as not belonging to Narrow Niger-Congo:
       — Mande: S-Aux-O-V-X is universal (for Senufo, see below)
       — Dogon, Ijoid: truly V-final structure

D. Areal language contact

1. Individual cases to be pursued (cf. Map):
       — Geographic closeness of Mande and Senufo (!westernmost Gur): S-Aux-O-V-X only
       — Mande contact relevant for other Non-Senufo Gur languages (Beyer p.c.)
       — Mande contact relevant for eastern South Atlantic languages (see Table 1, Map)
       — Possibly Songhay: phenomenon arose through contact(s), ?with Mande?

2. Contact possibly relevant on a wider scale across West/Central Africa (cf. Map)
       — Several families outside Narrow Niger-Congo in West Africa with
         consistent/frequent O-V: (Mande, Dogon, Songhay, Ijoid), especially
         strong in the West
       — *Westernmost* Narrow Niger-Congo with the greatest salience of S-Aux-O-V-X:
         Senufo, parts of other Gur, Kru
       — *Eastern* Narrow Niger-Congo generally with conditioning or restriction
         for S-Aux-O-V-X, if existent at all: Kwa, Benue-Congo, ?Adamawa-Ubangi
         — In line with above reconstruction

3. Fact to keep in mind: independent development very possible, according to the above
   two functional scenarios (grammaticalization, information structure) or still others
   — ?Moru-Mangbetu: V-O+G-N
   — ?West Nilotic
   — South Cushitic: geographically fairly remote, O-V order original
   — Ju: geographically remote, but V-O+G-N

4. More general observation
   — S-Aux-O-V-X clusters across Sub-Saharan Central African belt
   — Partly similar distribution in geographical and genealogical terms to
     other linguistic quirks in Africa: logophoricity, ATR, labiovelars,
     V-O-NEG (Güldemann forthcoming, in preparation)
   — See TABLE 3; compare S-Aux-O-V-X Map with Logophoricity Map
     (different types of gray symbolize different degrees of presence
     of a feature; partly problematic)

   — Clustering of S-Aux-O-V-X in the Sub-Saharan belt emerged by a conspiracy of factors:
     (a) Several functional predispositions for object shift:
         — Clause order and information structure, cooccurrence of O-V & G-N, etc.
     (b) Spread of language families with one or the other predisposition
     (c) General proliferation of O-V pattern in westernmost area

5. S-Aux-O-V-X both is, and is not, a "unitary phenomenon"
   — Many significant differences, as discussed above
   — Yet the overall pattern per se remains an African quirk, and a puzzle

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