

Word order in languages of the Lotuxo sub-group of Eastern Nilotic

Jonathan Moodie, University of Melbourne

Lokoya, Lopit and Otuho (Lotuxo) are Eastern Nilotic languages spoken in the area around Torit in Eastern Equatoria province, South Sudan. As is the case in other non-Bari Eastern Nilotic languages, the unmarked word order is VSO (Dimmendaal, 2005, p. 73; Vossen, 1983, p. 183). Other word orders do occur, but the three languages vary in the conditions under which word order changes. They also have different ways of marking the verb when it is not clause-initial. This paper presents an overview of these phenomena based on primary data collected with speakers of the three languages.

In all three languages, the subject or object can be moved in front of the verb to provide emphasis (a cleft or fronted construction giving SVO or OVS order). In addition, in all three languages, VOS word order is normally used when the object is higher in the prominence hierarchy. These are marked word orders. In contrast to the other two languages, Lokoya often uses VSO order with a pronoun but SVO order with a noun. This is in line with a general tendency in languages where pronouns tend to be used when the agent/subject is known or clear from the context, whereas nominal agents/subjects tend to constitute new information and, as such, they often precede the verb. This is not the case in the other two languages.

The verbal prefix is used when the nominal is placed in front of the verb in Lokoya and Lopit. I call this prefix the subordinate marker (SBO). While Lopit only has a single form /l-/ for this prefix, Lokoya marks it for masculine /l-/ , feminine /n-/ and plural /x-/. The Lokoya forms are shown in examples (1) to (3) in utterances which show the nominal preverbal construction. Otuho, on the other hand, does not mark the verb with a prefix when it is not clause-initial. These observations offer new insights into the typology of Eastern Nilotic languages.

- (1) Lokoya
àndé ná n-é-màndá-jò eító náɲòŋ
woman.ABS that.ABS SBO.F-3-hug-CONT child.F.ABS 3SG.F.POSS
'That woman is hugging her daughter.'
- (2) Lokoya
òndé ló l-é-màndá-jò oító lóɲòŋ
man.ABS that.ABS SBO.M-3-hug-CONT child.M.ABS 3SG.M.POSS
'That man is hugging his son.'
- (3) Lokoya
àxótò wòné x-é-màndá-jò àkàlibínòk xáɲòŋ
people.F these.F.ABS SBO.PL-3-hug-CONT children.F.ABS 3PL.F.POSS
'These women are hugging their children.'

References

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- Vossen, R. (1983). Comparative Eastern Nilotic. In M. L. Bender (Ed.), *Nilo-Saharan Language Studies* (pp. 177–207). African Studies Centre, Michigan State University.