

Look Right

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The syntax and semantics of clausal right periphery has been a topic of resurgent interest to linguists, as has typological variation in the way the right periphery can be derived. For languages that involve right dislocation, three main syntactic analyses have been proposed: (i) right dislocation as an illusion, with the apparent right-dislocated constituent staying in-situ and other material scrambling left; (ii) right dislocation as by-product of movement to the right (“Rightward Movement”), and (iii) right-dislocation as result of clausal ellipsis. While all three analyses seem plausible, they have rarely been contrasted within a single language. This talk fills this analytical gap. I present and analyze empirical data from Tongan, a Polynesian language, to allow us to adjudicate between the three proposals. Tongan is a VSO-VOS alternating language with rigid word order and case/agreement distinctions that prove useful in identifying missing structure.

- (1) Na’e kaukau’i [‘e he ta’ahine] [‘a e kulī]. **VSO**
PST wash ERG DET girl ABS DET dog
‘The girl washed the dog.’
- (2) Na’e kaukau’i [‘a e kulī] [‘e he ta’ahine]. **VOS**
PST wash ABS DET dog ERG DET girl
‘The girl washed the dog.’

There is ample evidence that VSO is the basic order in Tongan, derived by Verb Raising (Otsuka 2000, 2005). Given that, this talk addresses the question of how Tongan VOS is derived from VSO. I consider and reject an analysis along the lines of (i), whereby VOS is derived from VSO by leftward displacement of the object (Custis 2004; Otsuka 2005) or the stranding of the subject under leftward movement of the remaining TP. Instead, I provide evidence, including novel prosodic data, that Tongan VOS is derived from VSO via rightward displacement of the subject. Thus, Tongan VOS is a subject-topic structure. I then compare analyses (ii) and (iii) as possible derivations of Tongan VOS, and show that both analyses are plausible, but both face some theoretical and empirical challenges.

The Tongan data prompt two larger questions:

- (3) What is the right way to account for the information-structural status of right-peripheral constituents vis-à-vis the information-structural status of left periphery?
- (4) Assuming analyses (i)-(iii) are all available, can we predict which way the right periphery is generated based on independent properties of a language? Can a single language have more than one derivation of right-peripheral structures?