Eric Potsdam and Maria Polinsky. AFLA 27 at NUS, 2020

Tongan VOS: Coordination plus ellipsis?

Introduction. Tanaka 2001 and Ott & de Vries 2016 (O&dV) argue that right dislocation in Japanese and Germanic, respectively, is best analyzed as juxtaposition of two clauses with fronting and clausal ellipsis in the second clause, leaving the right-dislocated element as the sole remnant in final position. The analysis removes two apparent cases of rightward movement from the literature and moves towards a more restrictive theory in which rightward movement might not exist. This paper considers another case of rightward movement to see if it too can be re-analyzed in this way. Polinsky & Potsdam (to appear) argues that VOS word order in the Polynesian language Tongan is derived by rightward movement of S from the more basic VSO. We show that a COORDINATION+ELLIPSIS analysis is largely successful in accounting for characteristics of VOS.
Analysis. Tongan is an ergative-absolutive language. Its basic word order is VSO (Tchekhoff 1981, Otsuka 2000, others), (1). Under the coordination+ellipsis analysis of VOS, (2), a VSO clause is juxtaposed with a second clause in which the subject is fronted. The non-subject material in the second clause is then elided (shown by strikethrough) under identity with the first clause (Merchant 2001). There is an obligatory cataphoric link between the S in the second clause and a null correlate in the first clause.

(1) Na'e   fili   'e   Sione   'a   Pila   VSO
     PST   choose   ERG Sione   ABS Pila
     'Sione chose Pila.'

(2) [$_{CP1}$ Na'e fili pro_i 'a   Pila] **&** [$_{CP2}$ 'e Sione$_i$ ~~[$_{CP}$ na'e   fili t_i 'a   Pila]~~]
            PST   choose   ABS Pila   ERG Sione   PST   choose   ABS Pila
     lit. "He chose Pila, Sione."   'Sione chose Pila.'

The analysis accounts for three salient characteristics of VOS:

A.   S is backgrounded
B.   VO and S show clausal independence
C.   S shows connectivity with VO

A.   Polinsky 2016 documents a number of facts showing that S in VOS is backgrounded (discourse-given), parallel to backgrounding right dislocation in Germanic (O&dV 2016). S cannot be focused, new, or topical, precluding existentially or universally quantified expressions and *wh*-phrases, among other elements. As explained in O&dV, the backgrounded status of S follows from the relationship between the two clauses being one of specifying coordination.
B.   O&dV 2016 note that a central characteristic of the ellipsis analysis is that CP1 and CP2, VO and S in (2), constitute independent clauses. In particular, VO can stand on its own. It appears as just a verb phrase because Tongan licenses *pro*-drop with subjects and objects (Tchekhoff 1981, others). In support of this claim is the observation that some speakers allow *pro* to be replaced with an epithet in VOS, (3).

(3) %[Na'e   'alu ('a   e   to'a mo e to'a$_i$) ki   he'ene   pilinisipi] & 'a   Pila$_i$
         PST   go   ABS DET fellow   DAT POSS.3SG principal   ABS Pila
     'The idiot went to his principal, Pila.'

The clausal nature of S is supported by the fact that the second clause can be pronounced (with some redundancy), (4).

(4) [Na'e ui'i *pro*ᵢ 'a e faiako], [na'e ui'i 'e Mele_i 'a ia]
    PST call ABS DET teacher PST call ERG Mele ABS 3SG
    'She$_i$ called the teacher, Mele$_i$ called him.'

Finally, the biclausal nature of the construction surfaces in that VOS is excluded in some domains, such as relative clauses (Polinsky 2016:211) and clausal complements to control verbs, which are arguably insufficiently articulated to license the clausal specification relationship.

C.   In apparent conflict with clausal independence, S in VOS also evidences connectivity with VO. This is a consequence of S occurring in a parallel clause, which is nonetheless reduced by ellipsis. For example, S shows the case appropriate for the pronounced predicate. S is ergative with a transitive verb, (2), but absolutive with an intransitive verb, (3). S also shows person/number connectedness with pre-verbal subject clitics in the first clause, (5).

(5) [Na'a mo/??ke/*ne 'ave *pro* 'a e tohi] <u>'e koe mo ia</u>   VO<u>S</u>
    PST 2DU/2SG/3SG take ABS DET book ERG 2SG with 3SG
    'You and s/he took the book.'   (Polinsky 2016:199)

S in VOS can license a reflexive object despite the biclausal analysis. Reflexive interpretations are formed with a regular pronominal object plus the emphatic particle *pē* 'EMPH' immediately after the verb or after the pronominal object, (6). In VOS, the reflexive is bound by the null pronominal, not actually by the clause-final subject, (7).

(6) a. 'Oku tauhi (pē) <u>'e Pila</u> 'a ia (pē)   V<u>S</u>O
        PRS care EMPH ERG Pila ABS 3SG EMPH
    b. 'Oku tauhi (pē) 'a ia (pē) <u>'e Pila</u>   VO<u>S</u>
        PRS care EMPH ABS 3SG EMPH ERG Pila
        'Pila takes care of himself.'
(7) [CP1 'Oku tauhi (pē) *pro*ᵢ 'a iaᵢ (pē)] **&**
        PRS care EMPH ABS 3SG EMPH
    [CP2 'e Pilaᵢ ~~[CP 'oku tauhi (pē) tᵢ 'a ia (pē)]~~]
        ERG Pila PRS care EMPH ABS 3SG EMPH
    'Pila takes care of himself.'

Conclusion. We conclude that coordination+ellipsis provides a surprisingly successful account of Tongan VOS word order, potentially eliminating an instance of rightward movement from grammatical theory. In the remainder of the talk we address potential challenges to the analysis: Theoretically, the movement that fronts S in the second clause needs to be independently justified; while, empirically, the analysis makes predictions about locality, which has not been explored in Tongan syntax.

References. <u>Merchant, J.</u> 2001. *The syntax of silence.* Oxford: OUP. <u>Otsuka, Y.</u> 2000. Ergativity in Tongan. Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Oxford. <u>Ott, D., and M. de Vries.</u> 2016. Right-dislocation as deletion. *NLLT* 34, 641-690. <u>Polinsky, M.</u> 2016. *Deconstructing ergativity*. Oxford: OUP. <u>Polinsky, M. and E. Potsdam.</u> to appear. Deriving VOS from VSO in Tongan. In D. Massam and L. Clemens. Polynesian syntax and its interfaces. Oxford: OUP. <u>Tchekhoff, C.</u> 1981. *Simple sentences in Tongan*. Canberra: Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU. <u>Tanaka, H</u>. 2001. Right dislocation as scrambling. *J. Linguistics* 37, 551-579.