Tongan VOS: Coordination plus ellipsis?

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1 Introduction

- Tongan basic word order is VSO but it also allows VOS in many situations (Churchward 1953, Custis 2004, Otsuka 2000, 2005c, Ball 2008, others)

(1) a. Na'e fili 'e Sione 'a Pila **VSO**
PST choose ERG Sione ABS Pila
b. Na'e fili 'a Pila 'e Sione **VOS**
PST choose ABS Pila ERG Sione
'Sione chose Pila.' (Otsuka 2005c:246)

- Assuming that VSO is the basic word order, how is VOS derived?

Outline of the talk

- Morphosyntactic basics
- Two hypotheses for deriving VOS from VSO
  leftward object displacement vs. rightward subject positioning
- Dilemma: the right way to get the subject on the right
  movement vs. clausal coordination+ellipsis
- Conclusions

2 Tongan basics

Tongan (*lea faka-tonga*): Polynesian language of the Tongic subgroup, spoken by about 150,000 people (about 100,000 in Tonga)

- morphologically and syntactically ergative
- morphologically isolating (analytic)
- head-initial, predicate-initial, non-verbal predicates (including PPs)
- subject *pro*-drop (Tchekhoff 1981, Custis 2004, Otsuka 2000)

2.1 Derivation of VSO: Head movement

- VSO derived by movement of the verb to a functional head X° above the subject in spec,TP (Otsuka 2000, 2005a,c, Custis 2004, others)

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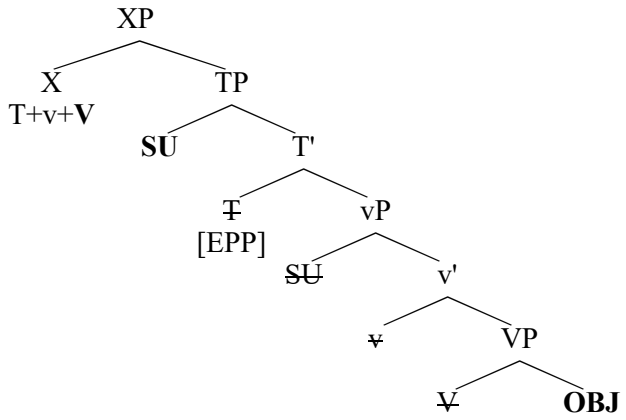

3 Two Hypotheses for VOS

(3) a. Na'e tuku ['e Siale] ['a e pa'anga] **VSO**
PST leave ERG Siale ABS DET money
b. Na'e tuku ['a e pa'anga] ['e Siale] **VOS**
PST leave ABS DET money ERG Siale
'Siale left the money.'

(4) a. Na'e 'alu ['a Mele] [ki 'apiako] **VSPP**
PST go ABS Mele to school
b. Na'e 'alu [ki 'apiako] ['a Mele] **VPPS**
PST go to school ABS Mele
'Mele went to school.'

Assume VSX is the basic word order with derivation as in (2), VXS can be derived by
L-OBJ: Leftward displacement of OBJ/PP
R-SUBJ: Rightward displacement of SUBJ

3.1 Leftward object displacement (L-OBJ)

See Otsuka 2005a,b,c, Custis 2004; Miyagawa 2001, 2003 for Japanese; Bossi & Diercks 2019 for Kipsigis

VOS derivation: OBJ raises to spec,TP, SUBJ remains in-situ

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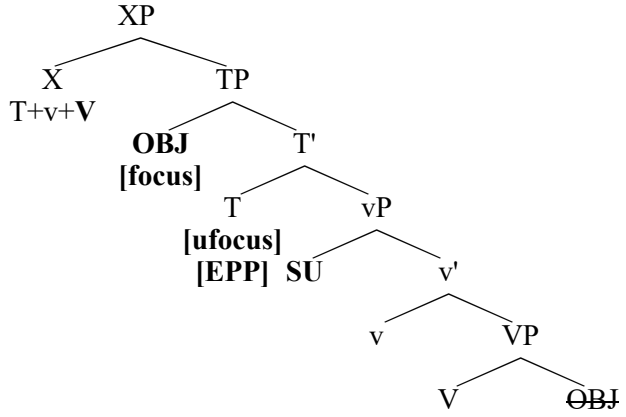

Leftward object movement is driven by EPP on T and focus feature on preposed element. Spec,TP is an all-purpose, EPP and focus position

3.2 Rightward subject displacement (R-SUBJ)

VOS derivation: SUBJ displaced rightward

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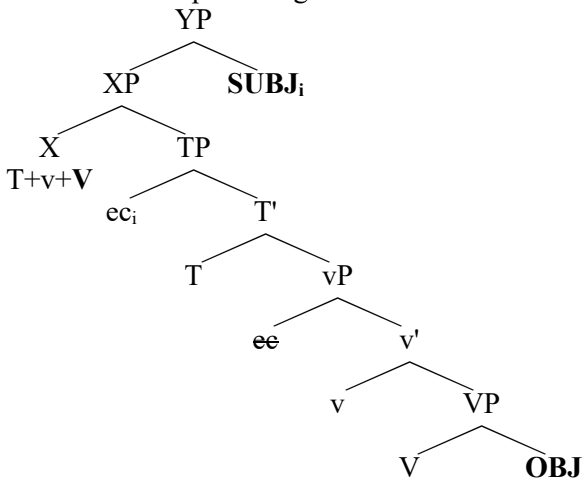


4 Evidence in favor of R-SUBJ

	L-OBJ	R-SUBJ
captures discourse status of core arguments	✘	✔
reflexive interpretations	✘	✔
word order options with an adjunct PP	✘	✔

4.1 Discourse status of core arguments

- Immediately post-verbal material is focused/new information (Custis 2004, Otsuka 2005c)

(7) What did Siale leave?

a. Na'e tuku 'a e pa'anga 'e Siale **VOS**
PST leave ABS DET money ERG Siale

b. # Na'e tuku 'e Siale 'a e pa'anga **#VSO**
PST leave ERG Siale ABS DET money
'Siale left the money.'

(8) Who left the money?

a. Na'e tuku 'e Siale 'a e pa'anga **VSO**
PST leave ERG Siale ABS DET money

b. # Na'e tuku 'a e pa'anga 'e Siale **#VOS**
PST leave ABS DET money ERG Siale
'Siale left the money.'

- Alternative proposal: The right-peripheral material is topicalized/old/backgrounded information

Object focusing is a side effect of the need for some constituent to be construed as new information/focus when the subject is old/backgrounded

4.1.1 non-focused objects

- The post-verbal object need not be focused. Custis 2004, in a corpus-based study of the pragmatics of word order variation, shows that VOS occurs when the object is the *topic* of the sentence (Custis 2004:60)

(9) What happened to the fish?

Na'e	kaiha'asi	'a	e	ika	'e	Mele	**VOS**
PST	steal	ABS	DET	fish	ERG	Mele	

'Mele stole the fish.' (Custis 2004:19)

We propose that the post-verbal position is covered by a negative condition: it is not backgrounded

4.1.2 indefinite subjects

- indefinite subjects are possible in VSO but not VOS

(10) a.

Na'e	'akahi	**'e**	**ha**	**leka**	'a	e	pusi
PST	kick	ERG	DET.NSPC	child	ABS	DET.SPC	cat

'A child kicked the cat.' **$VS_{indef}O$**

b. *

Na'e	'akahi	'a	e	pusi	**'e**	**ha**	**leka**
PST	kick	ABS	DET.SPC	cat	ERG	DET.NSPC	child

('A child kicked the cat.') ***VOS_{indef}**

(11)

Na'e	'akahi	'e	he	leka	'a	ha	tokotaha
PST	kick	ERG	DET.SPC	child	ABS	DET.NSPC	someone

'The child kicked someone.' **VSO_{indef}**

Indefinites resist topic interpretation (Gundel 1988, Krifka 2003, Reinhart 1981) and thus cannot be subjects in VOS

4.1.3 wh-*phrase*

- Subject wh-in-situ is impossible in VOS order

(12) a.

Na'e	'akahi	**'e**	**hai**	'a	e	pusi?	**$VS_{wh}O$**
PST	kick	ERG	who	ABS	DET	cat	

('Who kicked the cat?')

b. *

Na'e	'akahi	'a	e	pusi	**'e**	**hai**?	***VOS_{wh}**
PST	kick	ABS	DET	cat	ERG	who	

('Who kicked the cat?') (ok as an echo question)

c.

Ko	hai	na'a	ne	'akahi	'a	e	pusi?	**CLEFT**
KO	who	PST	3SG.CL	kick	ABS	DET	cat	

'Who kicked the cat?'

4.1.4 focused elements

- Inherently focused subjects are impossible in VOS order

(13) a.

'Oku	tauhi	**'e**	**Pila**	**pē**	'a	ia	**$VS_{foc}O$**
PRS	care	ERG	Pila	EMPH	ABS	3SG	

'Only Pila takes care of him.'

b. *

'Oku	tauhi	'a	ia	**'e**	**Pila**	**pē**	***VOS_{foc}**
PRS	care	ABS	3SG	ERG	Pila	EMPH	

4.1.5 summary

- SUBJ in VOS is topical/backgrounded/old information

This is not accounted for in L-OBJ since the subject has the same morphosyntax in both VSO and VOS. In R-SUBJ, the status of SUBJ in VOS can be attributed to its rightward structural position

4.2 Reflexive interpretations

Tongan does not have dedicated anaphors (Churchward 1953, Dukes 1996; Hendrick 2005). A reflexive reading is expressed with the emphatic particle *pē* 'only/EMPH', which is either post-verbal or following the lower argument. Reflexive reading is always optional (and subject to speaker variation)

Examples are (un)grammatical on the reflexive interpretation

(14) a.

'Oku	tauhi	(pē)	'e	Pila	'a	ia	(pē)	**VSO**
PRS	care	EMPH	ERG	Pila	ABS	3SG	EMPH	

i	he	fale manaki
LOC	OBL	hospital

'Pila takes care of himself at the hospital.'

b.

'Oku	tokoni	(pē)	'a	Pila	kiate	ia	(pē)
PRS	help	EMPH	ABS	Pila	DAT	3SG	EMPH

'Pila helps himself.'

(15) a. * ‘Oku tauhi ‘e Pila pē ‘a ia
PRS care ERG Pila EMPH ABS 3SG
i he fale manaki
LOC OBL hospital
(‘Pila takes care of himself at the hospital.’)

b. * ‘Oku tokoni ‘a Pila pē kiate ia
PRS help ABS Pila EMPH DAT 3SG
(‘Pila helps himself.’)

assumptions about reflexive interpretation

(16) a. Subject/spec,TP is structurally superior to complements
b. Reflexive interpretation is possible when *pē* ‘EMPH’ follows verb or structurally lower (bound) argument

R-SUBJ: In VOS, structural relations between OBJ and SUBJ are the same as in VSO. Expect same reflexive options in VOS as in VSO

(17) a. ‘Oku tauhi pē ‘a ia ‘e Pila **VOS**
PRS care EMPH ABS 3SG ERG Pila
(but see Ball 2008:88 which marks this pattern *)

b. ‘Oku tauhi ‘a ia pē ‘e Pila **VOS**
PRS care ABS 3SG EMPH ERG Pila
‘Pila takes care of himself.’
(but see Otsuka 2005c:(13a) which marks this pattern *)

L-OBJ: In VOS, the OBJ A-moves across the subject to spec,TP. (17b) is predicted to be bad as a Principle C violation. Predict OBJ to be able to bind SUBJ, as A-movement creates new binding options. (18) should be good.

(18) * ‘Oku tauhi ‘a Pila ‘e ia (pē)
PRS care ABS Pila ERG 3SG EMPH
(‘Pila takes care of himself.’)
(also marked * in Otsuka 2005c:(13b))

Otsuka 2005c:250 stipulates that the antecedent of a reflexively-interpreted pronoun must be ERG in order to prohibit (18) but this incorrectly excludes (14b)

- Reflexive patterns are identical in VSO and VOS orders for our consultants (contra Otsuka’s data), which supports R-SUBJ

4.3 Word order with an adjunct PP

VSOX basic word order

(19) Na’e tuku [‘e Sione] [‘a e tohi] [‘i he loki]
PST leave ERG Sione ABS DET book LOC DET room
V S O X
‘Sione left the book in the room.’ (Otsuka 2005c:(24a))

(20) other word orders
a. allowed: VSOX, VOSX, VOXS
b. disallowed: *VXSO, *VSXO, *VXOS

L-OBJ both overgenerates and undergenerates available word orders. It correctly predicts that an alternative word order will be ✔VOSX. It undergenerates ✔VOXS. It overgenerates *VXSO

correctly generates VOSX

(21) Na’e tuku **[‘a e tohi]** [‘e Sione] **t_{obj}** [‘i he loki]
PST leave ABS DET book ERG Sione LOC DET room
‘Sione left the book in the room.’

undergenerates VOXS (assuming only one XP can move to spec,TP)

(22) Na’e tuku **[‘a e tohi]** **[‘i he loki]**
PST leave ABS DET book LOC DET room
[‘e Sione] **t_{obj}** **t_{PP}**
ERG Sione
‘Sione left the book in the room.’
(Otsuka 2005c:(24d) which marks this as *; it is allowed in Ball 2008 and allowed by our consultants)

overgenerates *VXSO

(23) * Na’e tuku **[‘i he loki]** [‘e Sione] [‘a e tohi] **t_{PP}**
PST leave LOC DET room ERG Sione ABS DET book
(‘Sione left the book in the room.’)

R-SUBJ correctly predicts that an alternative word order will be ✔VOXS. It does not overgenerate, but it undergenerates ✔VOSX.

VOXS

(24) Na'e tuku ec$_i$ ['a e tohi] ['i he loki] ['e Sione]$_i$
PST leave ABS DET book LOC DET room ERG Sione
'Sione left the book in the room.'
(Otsuka 2005c:(24d) marks this as *; it is allowed in Ball 2008 and allowed by our consultants)

undergenerates VOSX

(25) Na'e tuku ['a e tohi] ['e Sione] ['i he loki]
PST leave ABS DET book ERG Sione LOC DET room
'Sione left the book in the room.'

We assume that some PPs can be adjoined high on the right, outside of the rightward subject

4.4 Intermediate summary

- VOS results from rightward displacement of SUBJ, not leftward displacement of OBJ

From a cross-linguistic perspective, object shift for focus purposes is unusual. Object shift is typically motivated by topicality (non-focus) (Holmberg 1999, Miyagawa 2003, Neeleman & Reinhart 1998, others, but see Bossi & Dierks 2019 on Kipsigis)

There are inconclusive arguments from Weak Crossover and locality (Polinsky & Potsdam, to appear, discussing the arguments from Otsuka 2005c)

5 Deriving R-SUBJ

How does the subject get on the right?

MOVEMENT: Subject moves rightward

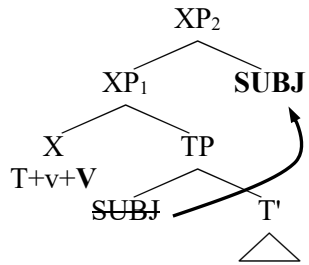
ELLIPSIS: Coordination of two clauses with fronting of subject in second clause followed by ellipsis

5.1 Movement (MVT)

The empty category is a trace/copy of the subject, which has undergone rightward movement

The movement is similar to Rightward Scrambling (Kural 1997, Manetta 2012, others) or Rightward Topicalization (Clemens & Coon 2018)

(26)



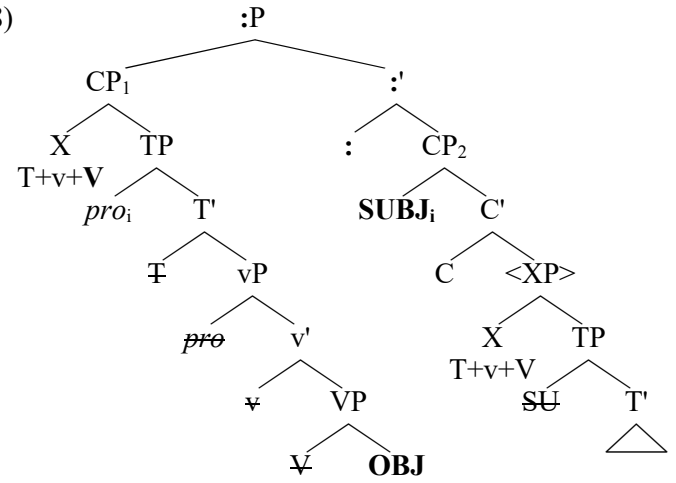
5.2 Coordination + Ellipsis (ELLIPSIS)

VOS results from coordination of two clauses, the second clause specifying the first one (Ott & de Vries 2016). The second clause contains the rightward subject. It is reduced through movement followed by ellipsis. The subjects of the two clauses are linked cataphorically

(27) a. Na'e tuku 'a e pa'anga 'e Siale VOS
PST leave ABS DET money ERG Siale
'Siale left the money.'

b. [$_{CP1}$ Na'e tuku *pro*$_i$ 'a e pa'anga]
PST leave ABS DET money
[$_{CP2}$ 'e Siale$_i$ ~~[$_{XP}$ na'e tuku [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ 'a e pa'anga]]]~~
ERG Siale PST leave the.money
'He left the money, Siale, ~~left the money~~.'

(28)



The relationship between CP_1 and CP_2 is one of specification. :P is SPECIFICATION COORDINATION (Koster 2000, de Vries 2009, Ott & de Vries 2016)

The relationship between the rightward subject and its correlate in the full clause is one of coindexation. For all individuals, events, etc. introduced in the second conjunct, the specificational operator **:** presupposes that they are identical to some individual, event, etc. in the first conjunct

juxtaposed sentences with near-identity are possible (pragmatically odd because of redundancy)

(29) Na'e ui'i {'e ha takotaha, *pro*} 'a e faiako,
PST call ERG DET someone ABS DET teacher
na'e ui'i 'e Sione ('a ia)
PST call ERG Sione ABS 3SG
'Someone called the teacher, Sione called him.'

6 Deciding between MVT and ELLIPSIS

	MVT	ELLIPSIS
discourse status of subject (section 4.1)	✘	✔
no rightward movement	✘	✔
independently motivated movement	✘	✘
impossibility of subject clitic doubling	✔	✘
epithet doubling	?	✔
case connectivity	✔	✔
reflexive interpretations (section 4.2)	✔	✔
word order options with an adjunct PP (section 4.3)	✔	✔

6.1 Information structure role of subject

In the MVT analysis, minimalist assumptions lead us to posit a feature [topic/bkgnd] on a head that triggers movement to the head's specifier (see Manetta's (2012) EPP-R feature)

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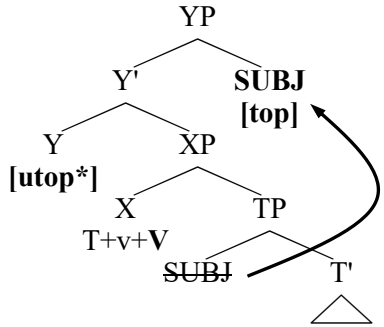

This is not explanatory. It gives us no expectations/predictions about the information structure role of the final SUBJ

Under ELLIPSIS, the information structure role of the final subject is identified. Because :P is specifying coordination, the subject in the second clause must particularize ("specify") its correlate in the first clause (Ott & de Vries 2016). It cannot introduce a new discourse referent, but it can, and must, be descriptively richer than its correlate

6.2 No rightward movement

Rightward movement is required under MVT but not under ELLIPSIS

Rightward movement has an uncomfortable position in generative syntax. Kaynian Antisymmetry (Kayne 1994) excludes it completely but it is still widely posited and argued for (Ko 2008, Ko & Choi 2009, Manetta 2012, Overfelt 2015, among others)

6.3 Motivating the movements

- Neither movement operation is independently motivated
- Motivating the movement in the ELLIPSIS analysis

(31) a. *Ko*-Topicalization/Focusing
b. fragment answer fronting

Ko-topicalization

(32) a. Ko Mele na'a ne kaiha'asi 'a e ika
KO Mele PST 3SG.CL steal ABS DET fish
'Mele stole the fish.' (Custis 2004:126)
b. Ko Pita na'e 'alu ki Nu'u Sila
KO Pita PST go to New Zealand
'Pita went to New Zealand.' (Custis 2004:153)

Ko-Topicalization/Focusing is not the right structure to feed ellipsis

(33) a. *ko* does not appear on the rightward subject in VOS
b. the XP following *ko* is not case-marked, unlike S in VOS

(34) a. Na'e tuku 'a e pa'anga (*ko) 'e Siale **VOS**
PST leave ABS DET money KO ERG Siale
'Siale left the money.'
b. * [$_{CP1}$ Na'e tuku *pro*$_i$ 'a e pa'anga]
PST leave ABS DET money
[$_{CP2}$ ko Siale$_i$ ~~[$_{XP}$ na'a ne tuku [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ 'a e pa'anga]]]~~
KO Siale PST leave the.money

(35) Ko (*'e) Siale na'a ne tuku 'a e pa'anga
KO ERG Siale PST 3SG.CL leave ABS DET money
'Siale left the money.'

Fragment answers are derived by fronting the answer to a high left peripheral position followed by ellipsis (Merchant 2004)

(36) Q Who is laughing?
A [$_{CP}$ Mary$_i$ C ~~[$_{TP}$ t$_i$ is laughing]~~]

Tongan fragment answers do not require *ko* and show case marking

(37) Q Ko hai 'oku kata?
KO who PRS laugh
'Who is laughing?'
A1 *('a) e leka ni A2 *('a) ia
ABS DET child that ABS 3SG
'that child' 's/he'

(38) Q Ko hai te ne fai 'a e ngāue?
KO who NPST 3SG do ABS DET work
'Who will do the work?'
A *('e) he faiako
ERG DET teacher
'the teacher'

Mechanically this achieves the right result, but fragments are new information/focused, while rightward subjects are old/background

6.4 No subject clitic doubling

In VSO, subject clitics co-occur with *pro* but not a full NP (Chung 1978, Dukes 1996, Otsuka 2000, others)

(39) a. Na'a **ne** kai *pro* 'a e ika **clV*pro*O**
PST **3SG.CL** eat ABS DET fish
'He ate the fish.' (Otsuka 2000:(6.2b))
b. * Na'a **ne** kai 'e Sione 'a e ika ***clVSO**
PST **3SG.CL** eat ERG Sione ABS DET fish
('Sione ate the fish.') (Otsuka 2000:(6.4b))

(40) a. Na'a **ne** 'alu *pro* **clV*pro***
PST **3SG.CL** go
'He went.' (Otsuka 2000:6.2a)

b. * Na'a **ne** 'alu 'a Sione ***clVS**
PST **3SG.CL** go ABS Sione
('Sione went.') (Otsuka 2000:(6.4a))

Subject clitic (clitic doubling) is impossible in VOS/VXS

(41) a. * Na'a **ne** kai 'a e ika 'e Sione ***VOS**
PST **3SG.CL** eat ABS DET fish ERG Sione
('Sione ate the fish.')

b. * Na'a **ne** 'alu ki 'apiako 'a Mele ***VPPS**
PST **3SG.CL** go to school ABS Mele
('Mele went to school.')

Under MVT, clitic doubling in VOS is bad for the same reason that it is bad with VSO. Movement of the subject rightward does not change the internal structure of the clause

ELLIPSIS does not explain why subject clitic doubling in VOS is impossible. The first clause is independently well-formed and the full NP subject in the second clause further specifies the null subject, independent of the presence/absence of a clitic in the first clause

(42) a. * Na'a ne kaukau he moana **'a** **Pila**
PST 3SG.CL swim DET sea ABS Pila
('Pila swam in the ocean.')

b. [Na'a ne$_i$ kaukau *pro*$_i$ he moana] **:**
PST 3SG.CL swim DET sea
['a Pila$_i$ ~~[na'a ne kaukau t$_i$ he moana]~~]
ABS 3SG
('He swam in the ocean, Pila.')

6.5 Epithet doubling

ELLIPSIS predicts that the rightward subject can be doubled in the first clause. Doubling should be impossible under MVT

Most speakers allow an epithet in the post-verbal subject position, doubling a full NP

(43) a. Na'e 'alu 'a Pila ki he'ene pilinisipi
PST go ABS Pila DAT POSS.3SG principal
'Pila went to his principal.'

b. %Na'e 'alu 'a e to'a mo e to'a$_i$ **VEp$_i$OS$_i$**
PST go ABS DET fellow
ki he'ene pilinisipi 'a Pila$_i$
DAT POSS.3SG principal ABS Pila
'The idiot went to his principal, Pila.'

MVT might account for the epithet data if epithets have a more complex structure in which they are nominal appositives to some other DP (Postal 1972, Potts 2005, Patel-Grosz 2015, others)

(44) [$_{DP1}$ DP [$_{DP2}$ *epithet*]]

The modified DP is the element that undergoes movement, stranding the epithet

6.6 Case connectivity

Rightward subject shows the case determined by the matrix predicate

(45) a. transitive predicate (ERG-ABS case frame)
Na'e tuku 'a e pa'anga **'e/*'a** **Siale**
PST leave ABS DET money **ERG**/ABS Siale
'Siale left the money.'

b. intransitive predicate (ABS case frame)
Na'e 'alu ki 'apiako **'a/*'e** **Mele**
PST go to school **ABS**/ERG Mele
'Mele went to school.'

c. middle predicate (ABS-DAT case frame)
Na'e ki he faiako **'a/*'e** **Pila**
PST DAT DET teacher **ABS**/ERG Pila
'Pila saw the teacher.'

Case connectivity follows under both MVT and ELLIPSIS

6.7 Intermediate summary

- Both MVT and ELLIPSIS are successful but with some theoretical and empirical challenges

7 Conclusions and open questions

- The derivational relationship between VSO and VOS in Tongan is more effectively captured by the rightward positioning of SUBJ than by leftward displacement of OBJ (a similar proposal is made for the derivation of VOS in Greek (Georgiafentis & Sfakianaki 2004))

- Evidence in support of rightward positioning of S
  - discourse status of core arguments
  - reflexive interpretations
  - word order options with an adjunct
  - case connectivity

- Rightward positioning can be modeled with movement or coordination+ellipsis under specificational coordination

- Neither analysis is entirely without problems at this point, but they are mostly theory-internal

- At the same time, both analyses work, and an outstanding question is how to adjudicate between them

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