THE TYPOLOGY OF WORD ORDER IN THE LANGUAGES OF ASIA

Vladimr M. Alpatov
Institute of oriental studies, Academy of sciences,
Moscow, USSR

When we shall speak about word order we shall
mean, firstly, the order of autosemantic words,
constituents of sentences, secondly, the word order
with a syntactic significance; in particular we
shall regard the variations of sentences with the
same syntactic structure but different communicative
structures or stylistic characteristics as synonyms.
The classifications of word order in that sense
are usually divided into two groupes. The authors of
the classifications of the first group fix first of
all the basic,, widespread word order; they divide
the languages into classes depending on the mutual
order of predicate, subject and direct object. The
authors of the classification of the second group
describe the degree of the strictness of the word
order, the possibilities of its changes without chan-
ges of the syntactic structure: the languages are
divided first of all into the languages with free and
fixed word order, or into the languages with different
degrees of strictness of word order. The first groupe
of classifications is peculiar to American (Greenberg
(1966; Lehmann (1975)), the second - to Soviet
(Kholodovich (1966); Rozhdestvenskiy (1969)) lingu-
ists: it is not accidental, since these differences
are connected with the interference of the structure
of the native language of the linguists. Some linguists
tried to combine both the approaches: Steele (1978);
Vardul (1989).
The languages with basic word orders SOV, SVO,
VSO, VOS, OSV, OVS (V - predicate, S - subject, O -
direct object) can be singled out; the two last basic
orders are very rare. From the point of view of the
degree of strictness of word order we can single out
two parametres: possibility or impossibility of the
change of the order of the dependent constituent,
possibility or impossibility of the change of the
order of constituents dependent on the main one.
There are four combinations of these two features
but the languages with fixation of only the second
order are not exist. There are three other possibili-

2.

ties: both orders are free, only the position of the dependent constituent is fixed, both orders are fixed. These types are found in the languages.

There are different types in the languages of Asia. However one of them is widespread and is concentrated in the certain area. L.Tesnière called that type "centripète", J.Greenberg - "rigid subtype of the SOV type". From the point of view of the degree of strictness of the word order they are characterized by the fixed position of depending constituents with respect to the main one and the free mutual position of several constituents dependent on the main one. From the point of view of the basic order they are characterized by the SOV order; besides only the order OSV is possible if this type is consistent.

This type covers all Asia with the exception of two peripheral areas: the south-east (China, the main part of Indo-China and adjoining islands) and the south-west (Arabia and territories to north and north-west of it); we do not take into account the recent spreading to Asia some languages of other areas and other types of word order, first of all Russian and English. This type of word order is wide-spread in general; according to Hawkins J. (1983) it includes more than 50% of the languages of the world. However we do not know other vast areas with only the languages of this type (with the exception of Russian and other languages of the recent colonization). As early as in the fifties L.Tesnière wrote that this type is widespread in Asia first of all.

The main rule of word order in these languages is: the dependent constituent is found before the governing one (we consider that predicate governs subject). The languages of this type are characterized by many common features besides word order. However they belong to different language families: on the contrary cognate languages of other areas can have other types of word order, the Indo-European languages are especially significant.

The languages of the consistent SOV type have the following features. The predicate of every clause takes the last place. Attributes of all the types are founded before their main words (in particular numerals before counted nouns, family names before first names). Dependent clauses are found before main clauses or within them directly before the main word. Many rules at other levels are revealed now: there are postpositions (not prepositions), only suffixes (not prefixes) in these languages, the order of components in compo-

3.

sita corresponds to the order in word-combinations.
J.Greenberg (1966) and W.P.Lehmann (1975) discovered
many such correspondences, but they (especially W.P.
Lehmann who proceeds from the Japanese standard too
straightforwardly) connect this type with many fea-
tures which are not peculiar to them, for instance the
honorific system in Japanese.

These features exist in all the languagesof that
area but with different strictness; in particular the
final position of predicate is the most usual and
frequent. But the degree of the consistence of that
features is not the same. Many differences are con-
nected with some contacts with the languages of other
types.

The most consistent languages of this type are
for instance Japanese, Corean, Ainu, many languages
of Siberia; for instance the Ob-Ugrian and Samojed
(except Nganasan) languages preserve this type better
than other Uralic languages.

Many of these languages did not contact with the
languages of other types or have contacted with them
since recent years. But the situation of Japanese is
the different: that language is Altaic (Starostin S.A.
(1991)) but it was influenced by the Austronesian
substrate; afterwards it was in long contacts with
Chinese. Nevertheless the order connected with the
preposition of depending constituents is kept very
strictly at the level of word orderin the foregoing
sense. The such examples as: Shimbun o katta ka? Ken-
kichi wa 'Bought a newspaper? Kenkichi...' or Ken-
kichi wa katta ka? Shimbun o 'Kenkichi bought? A news-
paper?' are not the exceptions. Vardul (1989) wrote
correctly: "There is a double construction of the same
sentence in our examples but that sentence is constru-
cted in two different elliptic variations; if that
variations are put together they supply the ellipsis
of each other" (p.27). Violations of that rule exist
in Japanese only at other levels: there are not nume-
rous prefixes which have correspondences in Austro-
nesian (Polivanov (1918)): words composed from roots
of Chinese origin retain the Chinese order of their
components.

The above-mentioned rules are not so rigid in
many other languages of Asia. The basic order does not
change usually but the word order becomes more free.
Some languages especially near the borders of the area
(Armenian, many Caucasian, Colloquial Turkish, some
Iranian languages) can be considered as the languages
with free word-order althoughtheir basic order is SOV

4.

(in contrast to Slavic and other languages with free
word order). The more considerable change with the
change of the basic order occurs usually when a lan-
guage finds itself inside another area; it is the
case of Finnish, Estonian (but not Hungarian) and two
Turkic languages: Gagauz and Karaim.

Different constituents of the sentence obey that
rule with different rigidity. On the whole the order
of predicates, subjects and objects is less rigid than
the order of attributes; it is fixed by linguists for
many languages of different parts of Asia (Turkmen,
Buryat, Tamil and other Dravidians,Bengali and so on).
The order of dependent clauses (especially the clauses
of time, cause, goal etc.) is the least stable in many
languages (Azerbaijan, Buryat and others). We must
take into account that this language type is charac-
terized by the presence of constructions with non-
finite verbal forms and not dependent clauses; these
clauses if they exist can be results of the influence
of the languages of other structure (Persian, Arabic,
Russian); therefore their order must not obey the
common rule.

The Burmese and Tibetan languages which are set-
tled near the border of the area too (but near the
south-east border) have some peculiarities. The order
SOV is rather strict but some classes of attributes
are postpositive. It is difficult to say if that
specific order is connected with an influence of the
neighbour languages of Indo-China which have postpo-
sitive attributes too; but the order of objects is
different.

The degree of rigidity of the rule is different
in the different styles of some languages. For ins-
tance the word order in the literary Turkish language
(news-papers, fiction excepting direct speech etc.)
is rather rigid but the word order in the colloquial
Turkish language is quite free. The similar case is
mentioned in the descriptions of Bengali.

It should be distinguished deviations from the
common rules under the influence of languages of
other structure and relics of the old type. The Indo-
Arian languages changed their structure under the
influence of Dravidian and other neighbour languages.
However they preserve some prepositions, possibility
of the postposition of some clauses and other
features.

Why this type of word order is widespread and
stable? We can say a priori about the opposite type

5.

of word order with the rigid preposition of the main
constituent. Although as early as in Greenberg (1966)
it is explained that the languages of VSO type exist
but unlike the rigid   SOV subtype the rigid VSO
subtype does not exist. The following researches
discovered the existence not only VSO languages
(Arabic, Tagalog and others) but VOS languages (Mala-
gasian). Although the initial position of predicates
is not strictly fixed in that languages. On the whole
the VSO and VOS languages are not widespread as the
SOV languages; their number is three times as small
as the number of SOV languages: Hawkins (1983). The
area of that languages in Asia is in the south-west
and in the extreme south-east (Philippines, Poly-
nesia). There are some hypotheses about that asymme-
try. J.Greenberg supposes that it is more important
to mark the end of an utterance than its beginning
which usually is clearer. Kozinskjy (1980) suggested
another interesting hypothesis. He consideres that
there are three rules in the languages, each of them
is true for not less than 70% of all the languages.
These rules are: the position of subject before pre-
dicate, the contact position of predicate and direct
object, the contact position of subject and object.
The SOV order is the only word order obeyed all that
rules. However the OSV order is possible in the
languages with the basic SOV order; if the order of
several constituents dependent from the main one is
mutually fixed too the SVO order is more typical:
compare English, French on the one hand and Chinese,
Thai etc. on the other hand.

The Asian languages of this type usually have
explicit markers of the subject-object relations
besides word order (affixes or particles). Hence the
word order in that languages can become free without
the total change of the linguistic type. It is
especially typical for the languages of Western Asia
where they are in contact with languages with free
word order. However contacts with the languages with
the fixed word order of other types (Chinese, langu-
ages of Indo-China) does not change the rigidity of
the rules.

REFERENCES
Greenberg J (1966)'Some universals of grammar with
        particular reference to the order of
        meaningful elements'- In J.Greenberg (ed)
        Universals of Languages. Cambridge(Mass.)
Hawkins J. (1983) Word Order Universals. New York.

6.

Kholodovich A.A. (1966) 'K tipologii poryadka slov'
        Filologicheskiye Nauki, Mosow, N3.
Kozinskiy I.Sh. (1980) Nekotoryye Grammaticheskiye
        Universalii v Podsistemah Vyrazheniya
        Subyektno-obyektnyh Otnosheniy.Moscow
Lehmann W.P. (1975)'Discussion of compound and word
        order'. In Lehmann W.P. (ed) Word Order
        and Word Order Change. New York.
Polivanov E.D. (1918) 'Odna iz yapono-malayskih pa-
        ralleley' Izvestiya Rossiyskoy Akademii
        Nauk. Petrograd, t.XII, N18.
Rozhdestvenskiy Yu.V. (1969) Tipologiya Slova.
        Moscow, Nauka.
Starostin S.A. (1991) Altayskaya Problema i Proisho-
        zhdeniye Yaponskogo Yazyka. Moscow,
        Nauka.
Steele S. (1978) 'Word order variation: a typological
        study' In Universals of Human Language, v.4.
Tesnière L. (1959) Eléments de syntaxe structural.
        Paris, Librarie C.Klinksieck.
Vardul I.F. (1989) 'O yazykovyh tipah v parametre
        poryadka slov' In Vardul I.F. (ed) Oche-
        rki Tipologii Poryadka Slov. Moscow,Nauka.