

## TAM-Full Object-Verb order in the Mbam languages of Cameroun

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Tunen and Nyokon, both Cameroonian Mbam-Bantu languages allow for a full noun phrase object to occur before the verb and after the “tense” marker (1). In Nyokon certain “tense” markers exclude this option (progressive, perfect (3), future). For a number of tenses in Nyokon there is a pragmatic choice which also includes the option of head noun before the verb and modifiers after the verb (for contrastive focus on the modifier (2)). It is only the direct object that can occur before the verb; this option is not open for dative or other complements. The data on Nyokon were collected in the summer of 2012.

(1) Nyokon

m ándwóm àyí itá káp píí nà'

1sg rec.past:sheep rel father buy yday eat:pres

j'ai mangé le mouton que mon père a acheté hier.

(2)

m ándwôm ndà' àmò

1sg rec.past:sheep give:pres one

j'ai donné un mouton (pas deux).

(3)

yé tâ nóò yóó áyòò

2sg.poss father pf kill:past snake

ton père a tué un serpent.

not: nóò àyòò yóó

Tunen, Nyokon's neighbour is very similar in this respect (Mous 1997). For example, compare (2) with the contrastive focus on the modifier in (4).

(4)

məna imitə ye mwənifi indi meŋeŋ o hɛlobato

1SG:PAST 9:calabash 9:of 6:water give 9:big LOC 19:child

'I gave the BIG water calabash to the child.'

There are however intriguing differences of detail between the two languages. One is that Nyokon disallows the OV order in certain verb conjugations while Tunen allows both order OV and VO (with pragmatic differences) in all conjugations. The most striking difference is that Nyokon has VO to the exclusion of OV in negative clause while Tunen has the reverse.

In infinitival complements the object can occur before the verb and after the verb for certain pragmatic functions. The study of infinitival complements allows us to expand to other Mbam languages with such word order options, among them Gunu.

After an examination of the placement properties and restrictions, and their pragmatic meaning in Tunen and Nyokon I compare these to similar phenomena in Aghem and Tikar, other Cameroonian Bantu/oid languages with OV option, in order to arrive at a better understanding of the pragmatic functions of object order in these languages. The different positional options for the object allow for different pragmatic functions for these positions. The position after the verb (or IAV) develops contrastive function in Nen and Nyokon but more general focus in Aghem. In Aghem focussed objects in terms of new information cannot occur before the verb; they can in Nen and Nyokon. In Aghem the position before the verb IBV has developed a pragmatic function of given information. In Nyokon and Nen the preverbal position has not developed specific pragmatic functions. Except when part of a construction in which there is a link with the constituent after the verb. There are no indications for such secondary predicate type of constructions in Aghem and Tikar. None of the languages that allow a full object preverbally show properties of noun incorporation. There is no compounding; there are no restrictions that the preverbal noun must be bare; etc.

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