

V-Final in Negative constructions in Nweh and Dschang: the Path of VO to OV

While Grassfield Bantu languages exhibit very clear head complement orders, Watters 2003 cites Nweh, Bafut, Babungo, Aghem, Ngie as having surface OV orders in (a subset of) negative constructions. For most of these languages, the formal properties that underly these alternations have not been described. Most of what is known about the formal properties, including scope, and the (complicated) interaction of negation with focus comes from Nkemnji (1995)'s in-depth study of his native language Nweh. In this talk, we will extend this study and use the formal properties (and problems) established for Nweh to probe the properties of Dschang (Bamileke) which appears to have similar alternations. This will allow finer grained comparisons, pursuing possible correlations, and gaining further insight in the (quite complex) interactions of negation, focus and the scope of negation.

Clausal negation in Nweh consists of two parts, Neg1 -following the subject and tense marker - and a clause final Neg (Neg2) *bɔ*, which alternates with the main verb (in certain tenses), as shown in the following examples Nkemnji (1995:p117: 7a/b and 8 a/b).

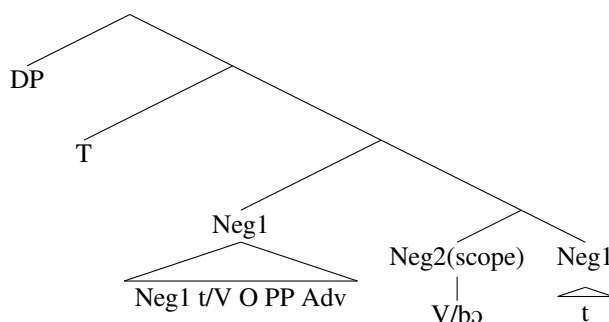
Njikèm a kè **te- fiá** nkāp anbó Atem əjúá **bɔ**
 N. Agr P-2 Neg give money to A. yesterday Neg
 'Njikem did not give money to Atem yesterday'.

Njikèm a kè **te-** nkāp anbó Atem əjúá **fiá**
 N. Agr P-2 Neg money to A. yesterday give
 'Njikem did not give money to Atem yesterday'.

mù n-kè? **te-** jú? [lé [Njikem a kà fiá nkap anbó Atem əjúá]] **bɔ**
 I Agr P-1 Neg hear that N. Agr P-2 give money to A. yest'day Neg
 'I did not hear that Njikem gave money to Atem yesterday'

mù n-kè? **te-** [lé [Njikem a kè fiá nkap anbó Atem əjúá]] **jú?**
 I Agr P-1 Neg that N. Agr P-2 give money to A. yest'day hear
 'I did not hear that Njikem gave money to Atem yesterday'

As Nkemnji shows, the difference between the a and b examples should be attributed to the surface position of the verb, which turns out to be in complementary distribution with the sentence final *bɔ* – not to movement of the object, leading to O X V orders –. Since Nweh has no candidates for rightward movement at all, this, Nkemnji argues, should be analyzed as the result of the interaction of V movement to Neg2, the scope position where *bɔ* surfaces, and movement of a constituent marked with Neg1 to the left of Neg2. Neg2 is the higher head comparable to French *ne*, Neg1 is a negative "feature" triggering pied-piping to Spec, Neg2. As expected, all adjuncts and clausal complements will be pied-piped by Neg1 to the left of Neg2 (reason adjuncts may follow (or precede) the final V or *bɔ*, with unambiguous interpretations). In a (simplified) tree:



These derivations pose interesting (and largely unsolved) puzzles with respect to the interaction of negation and focus: it turns out that verb final structures do not always have the same focus interpretation as structures with final *bɔ*), that constituent negation is difficult to diagnose, and that because adjuncts are the only constituents that may appear not only before, but also after *bɔ*, with unambiguous scopal readings.

The overall goal of the research is to arrive at a better understanding of the nature of the variables that underly these word order alternations and their interpretative properties, and to generate a theoretically informed questionnaire that can be freely used to collect the relevant data for formal comparative syntax purposes in the Grassfield Bantu languages and beyond, so as to broaden future investigation. Finally, the understanding of these alternations (what is stable and what can vary) is theoretically important as it can provide a particular window into the possible derivational paths leading to surface OV orders in the world's languages.

References

Nkemnji, Michael Akamin. 1995. *Heavy pied-piping in Nweh*: PhD, UCLA dissertation.