

4. Basic constituent orders

4.1. Main clauses

A comprehensive study of naturally occurring texts reveals that the basic constituent order is SV in intransitive clauses (ex. 33), and SVO in transitive clauses (ex. 34). Variations in this pattern are rare, and clearly function in pragmatically marked contexts (see below and sections 14 and 17) :

(33) S V
A man arrive-d. 'Un hombre llegó.'
un hombre llegar-PAS

(34) A V P
Dog-s chase cat-s. 'Los perros persiguen los gatos.'
perro-PL perseguir:NOPAS gato-PL

Indirect objects and other obliques (marked by prepositions) typically occur after S, A and P:

(35) A V P [DAT][LOC]
I gave it to you at the store.
1SG dar: PAS 3SG:NEUT DAT 2 LOC DEF tienda
'Te/Se lo dí en la tienda (a Uds.).'

Alternative orders of elements are clearly used in pragmatically marked contexts. For example, a direct object can be fronted in contrastive sentences:

(36) P A V
Bean-s I like. 'Me gustan **frijoles.**' (Pero arroz no.)
frijol-PL 1SG gustar:NOPAS

Also, in certain intransitive clauses, notably yes/no questions, and presentatives, the subject and inflected verb may be reversed:

YES/NO QUESTION INVERSION:

(37) V A P 'Tienes un fósforo?'
Have you a match?
tener:NOPAS 2 INDEF fósforo

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PRESENTATIVE INVERSION:

(38) LOC V S 'Aquí viene mi autobús.'
Here come-s my bus.
aquí venir-NOPAS:3SG 1SG:GEN autobús

(39) LOC V S
On the wall hung a portrait of Mao.
en DEF pared colgar:PAS INDEF retrato de Mao
'En la pared estaba un retrato de Mao.'

Other orders are simply ungrammatical:

(40) *Beans like I / *Like I beans / *Like beans I

Since all PV, VS and VA clauses are pragmatically marked, we conclude that the basic order of elements in main declarative clauses is SV/AVP. This characteristic is consistent with the VO language type as discussed in Lehmann (1981:16).

4.2. Prepositional phrases

English uses prepositions to mark most grammatical functions and/or semantic roles of NPs other than subject and object:

(41) a. to you b. in the car c. during the Spring
a 2 LOC DEF auto durante DEF primavera
'a ti' 'en el auto' 'durante la primavera'

There is only one postposition, *ago*:

(42) a year ago 'hace un año'
INDEF año pasado

We conclude that English is dominantly prepositional. This characteristic is consistent with the canonical VO constituent order type as discussed in Lehmann (1981:16).

4.3. Noun phrases

4.3.1. Modifiers

Determiners, numerals and descriptive modifiers precede their head nouns:

- (43) a. a large cat b. the blue bus
 INDEF grande gato DEF azul autobús
 'un gato grande' 'el autobus azul.'
- c. three ugly duck-ling-s d. that beautiful lion
 tres feo pato-DIM-PL DEMO bonito león
 'tres patitos feos' 'ese león bonito.'

This regular placement of descriptive modifiers before the head noun is inconsistent with the otherwise dominant VO pattern of English according to Greenberg (1963). However, more recent work by Dryer (1988) and others indicates that order of adjective and noun correlates very loosely, if at all, with main clause constituent order.

4.3.2. Genitive constructions

Modern English has two types of genitive constructions. The most common type places the possessor (i.e., the genitive NP) before the possessed item. When the possessor is a full NP it receives an -s suffix:

- (44) a. John-'s car b. Mary-'s success
 Juán-GEN auto María-GEN éxito
 'El auto de Juán' 'el éxito de María.'

However, when the possessor is pronominal, the pronoun is chosen from a distinct genitive set of pronouns (see section 3.1.2).

The second, more unusual, type of genitive construction places the possessor in a prepositional phrase with the preposition *of* 'de' after the possessed item. Again, a distinct set of pronouns is used in such constructions when the possessor is pronominal:

- (45) a. the car **of John** b. this car **of mine**
 DEF auto de Juán DEMO auto de 1SG:GEN
 'el auto de Juán' 'el auto mío'
- c. a bag **of bone-s** d. that sister **of hers**
 INDEF saco de hueso-PL DEMO hermana de 3SG:F:GEN
 'un saco de huesos' 'esa hermana suya (de ella)'
 (i.e., saco que contiene huesos)

The difference in choice of one or the other type of genitive construction is partially discourse/pragmatically based, and partially semantically based. Investigation of the discourse/pragmatic and semantic properties of these constructions lies outside the scope of the present sketch.

Since the dominant type of genitive construction in English is GEN-NOUN, this is another area in which English is inconsistent with the canonical VO language type according to Greenberg (1963).

4.3.3. Relative clauses

In English, relative clauses consistently follow their heads (see section 15.1 for further examples):

- (22) DET HEAD [RELATIVE CLAUSE]
The man who went to Springfield
DEF hombre REL:HUM ir:PAS a Springfield
'el hombre que fué a Springfield'

This fact is consistent with observations made by Greenberg (1963) for languages of the VO type.

4.4. Verb phrases

Within the verb phrase, inflected auxiliaries consistently precede the main verb:

- (46) He **do-es** have a dollar. 'El, sí, tiene un dólar.'
3SG:MASC AUX-NOPAS tener INDEF dólar
- (47) He **will** eat bean-s. 'El comerá frijoles.'
2SG:MASC AUX:FUT comer frijol-PL
- (48) They **should** follow instruction-s. 'Ellos deben seguir las instrucciones.'
3PL deber seguir instrucción-PL
- (49) Fillmore **has** received the letter. 'Fillmore ha recibido la carta.'
Fillmore AUX:PERF recibir-PPAS DEF carta
- (50) Spanky **was** lead-er of our gang.
Spanky ser:PAS guiar-AGT GEN 1PL:GEN pandilla
'Spanky fue el líder de nuestra pandilla.'

Multiple auxiliaries are also allowed in English. In this case, it is always the left-most auxiliary that receives tense and person inflection, if relevant:

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- (51) AUX1 AUX2 AUX3 AUX4 AUX5 V
They **have** been able to be do-ing work.
3PL AUX:PERF AUX:PPAS AUX:POT AUX:PROG AUX-PPRES trabajo
'Ellos han podido estar haciendo el trabajo.'

The fact that inflected auxiliaries precede main verbs in English is consistent with observations by Greenberg (1963) for languages of the VO type.

4.5. Comparatives

In comparative constructions, the adjective describing the quality by which two items are compared comes first, then the marker of comparison and finally the standard of comparison (ADJ-MKR-STD):

- (52) ADJ [MKR] STD
The dog is bigg -er than the cat
DEF perro ser:NOPAS grande-más que DEF gato
'El perro es más grande que el gato.'

This order of ADJ-MKR-STD is consistent with expectations for languages of the VO type, according to Greenberg (1963).

4.6. Summary of constituent order typology

The only respect in which English departs from the canonical VO language type as described by Greenberg (1963 and 1966) is in the placement of descriptive modifiers before the head noun in the noun phrase. However, more recent work by Dryer (1988), working with a much larger sample of languages than Greenberg's, shows that this particular correlation is the weakest of those observed by Greenberg. In fact there is no universal correlation between order of descriptive modifier and head noun with order of elements in main clauses. Therefore, we can say that English is a completely consistent VO language.