

ON DIRECTIONALITY AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE VERB PHRASE:

EVIDENCE FROM NUPE*

Abstract: We propose a movement account of why some verb phrases seem to be head-final in the Nupe language whereas others seem to be head-initial. Several converging arguments are given that verbs come before their complements in the underlying structure. Apparent counterexamples come from the presence of identifiable functional heads within the verb phrase structure that attract NPs to their specifier position. Two such heads are distinguished: Agro^0 , which attracts an NP non-locally for purposes of licensing accusative case, and Infin^0 , which attracts the closest NP to check an EPP feature regardless of whether it is case marked. We briefly compare our analysis to remnant movement analyses to sharpen the typology of leftward movement in natural language. We conclude that the success of Kayne's (1994) approach to word order depends on uncovering and cataloging the triggers of these movements.

Key words: directionality, verb phrase, word order, movement triggers, feature checking, West African languages.

* This research would have been completely impossible without the extensive help of our colleague Dr. Ahmadu Ndanusa Kawu, who is a native speaker of Nupe. We thank him for patiently answering all of our questions, for engaging in long discussions on the structure of his language, and for saving us from many mistakes. All of the data reported in this paper reflect his dialect. We thank Maria Bittner for suggesting that the three of us work together, and for the financial support that facilitated this. We also thank audiences at the Syntactic Theory at Rutgers Group (especially Akin Akinlabi, Viviane Deprez, Jane Grimshaw, Markus Hiller, Ken Safir, and Alexandra Zepter), the UCLA linguistics community (especially Daniel Büring, Hilda Koopman, Tim Stowell, and Harold Torrence), Jasmine Albuquerque, Annabel Cormack, Ijaja Eno, Alex Iwara, Victor Manfredi, Neil Smith, the participants of ACAL 33, and two extremely helpful and thorough anonymous reviewers. All errors and oversights are our responsibility.

The Nupe spelling employed in this article conforms to the modern orthography, and thus differs slightly from the classic orthographies of Banfield (1914) and Banfield and Macintyre (1915). In what follows, high tone is marked with an acute accent over the vowel and low tone by a grave accent. Mid tones are unmarked. Abbreviations used in the glosses of example sentences include the following: AGR, agreement; FOC, focus; FUT, future; ITER, iterative; LOC, locative; NEG, negation; PERF, perfect; PLUR, plural; PRES, present; PRT, particle; PURP, purposive.