The derivation of verb-initiality in Santiago Laxopa Zapotec (SLZ)

Verb-initial languages pose a challenge for syntactic theories that posit a universal hierarchical order between subjects and objects. For Zapotec languages—which have VSO basic word order—there are two main accounts: *verb raising* (Black 2000, Foreman 2006, a.o.) and *predicate raising* (Lee 2006) (though see Broadwell 2005). Based on original fieldwork, we investigate the derivation of word order in Santiago Laxopa Zapotec (SLZ), a previously unstudied Northern variety, most closely related to Zoogocho Zapotec (Sonnenschein 2004). For SLZ, we argue that VSO word order is derived by predicate raising, not verb raising. This suggests that there may be multiple routes to verb-initiality within the same language family.

Like other Zapotec varieties, SLZ has VSO basic word order: subjects strictly precede objects (1).

1. Dzut nu’ule’e=n bene’ xjage’e=n.
   CONT:hit woman=DEF person man=DEF
   ‘The woman is hitting the man.’ (Not possible: ‘The man is hitting the woman.’)

Assuming the verb forms a constituent with the object, if the subject starts higher than the object—in the specifier of the functional head v (Kratzer 1996)—there are two main ways to derive this order. V raises by itself into T(ense) (2a). Or, vP raises into the specifier of T, after the subject and object have moved out (2b).

a. **Verb raising**

\[
\begin{align*}
[TP & [T V] [vP NP_S [VP tV NP_O]]]
\end{align*}
\]

b. **Predicate raising**

\[
\begin{align*}
[TP & [vP tS [VP V tO] T NP_S NP_O tvp]]
\end{align*}
\]

We present two principal arguments that VSO word order in SLZ is derived through predicate raising. First, adjectival and nominal predicates can occur in initial position with a copula (3). If the copula realizes v (Mikkelsen 2005), movement of vP will place both the copula and this predicate before the subject (4).

3. Zoo trist Pablo.
   be sad Pablo
   ‘Pablo is sad.’

4. \[
\begin{align*}
[TP & [VP zoo [AP t1 trist]] T Pablo t1vp] = (3)
\end{align*}
\]

By comparison, the verb-raising account has no way of deriving (3). While the copula may be able to move to T, the adjective is a separate head and cannot move with it.

The second argument comes from adverb position. Aspectual adverbs occur unexpectedly early in the clause (5), given their typical low structural position (Cinque 1999). Under the predicate raising account, if chintghe’ ‘just’ adjoins to VP, it will always raise with vP, deriving its strict sentence-initial position (6).

5. (Chintghe’) pta (*chintghe’) Sonia=n (*chintghe’) zah (*chintghe’).
   just COMPL:stir just Sonia=DEF just bean just
   ‘Sonia just stirred the beans.’

6. \[
\begin{align*}
[TP & [vP t1 [VP chintghe’ [VP pta t2]]] T Sonia t1vp] = (5)
\end{align*}
\]

Temporal and manner adverbs, which occur higher in the clause, appear in initial or final position (7). This follows from predicate raising: if neghe ‘yesterday’ adjoins to vP, it can be fronted (8a) or stranded (8b).

7. (Neghe) be’eye’ (*neghe) Maria=n (?neghe) yetgu’u=n (neghe).
   yesterday COMPL:steam yesterday Maria=DEF yesterday tamale=DEF yesterday
   ‘Maria steamed the tamales yesterday.’

8. a. \[
\begin{align*}
[TP & [vP neghe [vP t1 [VP be’eye’ t2]]] T Marian t1vp] = (7)
\end{align*}
\]

b. \[
\begin{align*}
[TP & [vP t1 [VP be’eye’ t2]] T Marian t1vp] = (7)
\end{align*}
\]

Crucially, the verb-raising account cannot derive this order of adverbs. If V moves to T, the verb should invariably precede, not just the temporal and manner adverbs, but also the aspectual adverbs adjoined to VP.

In sum, we have argued that verb-initial word order in SLZ arises through predicate raising. This raises some questions: Why are some adverbs ungrammatical or degraded between the verb and its arguments? What drives movement of the subject and object out of vP? We hope to answer these questions in the future.
References


