

Samoan predicate fronting: Constructing word order alternations

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I compare some competing analyses of verb-initial word order and using novel data from Samoan (Polynesian), I argue that Samoan's basic VSO order is best understood as being derived by the movement of a constituent containing the verb to a position higher than the subject. According to this analysis, subjects and objects move to non-thematic positions, but only when certain structural conditions are met. Based on this observation, I outline a theory of syntactic movement, proposing that XP-movement is triggered by features on functional heads, but that these features may in some cases be satisfied without any movement occurring. More generally, I argue that the study of the syntax of VSO languages can shed light on the putative universality of particular movement operations.

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