The SOV Structure of Mende
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1.   Derived Nature of Mende's OV structure

In this talk I argue that Mende's SOV word-order is underlyingly SVO. The subject, verb, and object all subsequently raise out of the verbal shell generating the canonical SOV order.

Mande languages are claimed to have a strict SOVX order (Gensler 1994, Nikitina 2009, Creissels 2005).

(1)[1]   **S   O   V**
    Peter mbe-i   yeya-i-lɔ[2]
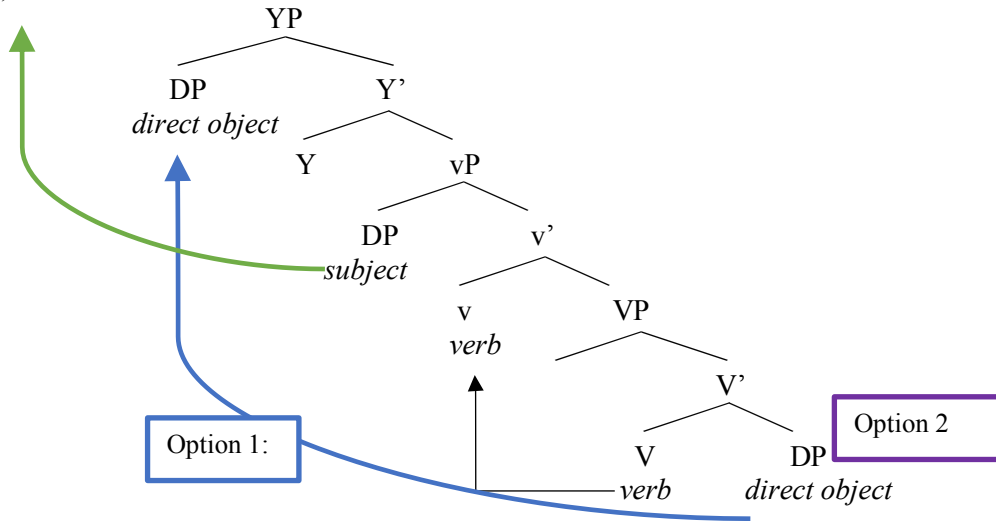   Peter rice-DEF.SG buy-PST-ASP
    'Peter bought the rice'

I argue that:
- The base order in the verbal shell is SVO (Kayne 1994)
- On the surface: two types of verbs
    - V with pre-verbal object
    - V with post-verbal objects
- They are distinguished by how they get case

Empiral Objective: Mende is not strictly SOV

Analytical Objective: Mende's underlying structure is SVO

(2)   Canonical Verbs and A-Verbs

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[2] I use standard Mende orthography throughout

Evidence for this analysis from 3 sources:
   a) Existence of verbs that take post-verbal objects

(3)   ngi {*guli} ja-i-lɔ   a {guli}
        1SG   tree   touch-PST-ASP A tree
        'I touched the tree'

   b) Unergative verbs that take pre-verbal or post-verbal cognate objects
   c) Quantifier float

Roadmap:
   • Background on Mende
   • Previous research on Mende and Mande languages
   • Evidence for this analysis from 3 sources
   • Conclusion

2.   Background:
   • Data collected in Bo, Sierra Leone, in 2019 through structured elicitation with 2 native speakers, and follow up via WhatsApp and Zoom

Mende Background
   • Mende (ISO 639-2 *men*) ~ two million speakers in the southern and eastern parts of Sierra Leone and Liberia (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2020).

4 Major Dialects of Mende
Kɔɔ   (eastern Sierra Leone)
Kpa   (southwestern Sierra Leone)
Sewama   (south-central Sierra Leone)
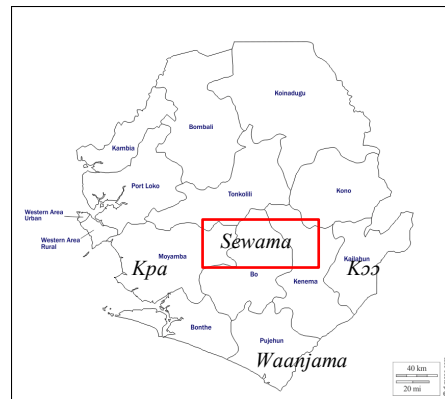*Waanjama*   (south-eastern Sierra Leone and Liberia)

Figure 1 - Mende Speaking Areas of Sierra Leone (https://dmaps.com/carte.php?num_car=66061&lang=en)

   • Previous research - *Kɔɔ* (c.f. Innes 1967)
   • My research and examples - *Sewama*

Language Family: Niger Congo - Mande - Western Mande (Williamson and Blench 2000).
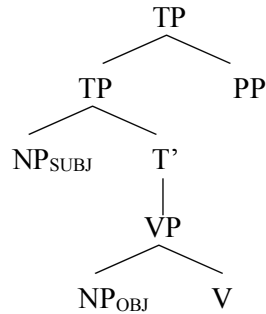
3.   Previous Syntactic Analyses:

Mende

   • Very little syntactic analysis (most work on tone (c.f. Leben 1973, Goldsmith 1978) and consonant mutation (c.f. Dwyer 1969, Conteh, Cowper and Rice 1986, and Tateishi 1990))
   • Descriptive grammar Innes (1971)
   • Tense/Aspect Sengova (1981)

Mande Family
- Western Mande: Mahou (Koopman 1984), Kpelle (Travis 1989), Bambara (Koopman 1992), Dafing (Sande, Baier, Jenks 2019)
- Eastern Mande: Wan (Nikitina 1997, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2019)

(4)   Clausal Structure of Wan (adapted from Nikitina 2009: 19)

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                    TP
                   /  \
                 TP    PP
                /  \
          NP_SUBJ   T'
                    |
                    VP
                   /  \
              NP_OBJ   V
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LFG Analysis - doesn't seem like it could be straightforwardly transferred to Mende
- Post-verbal direct objects

4.   Towards an Analysis
4.1   *A*-verbs
- There are verbs in Mende with post-verbal objects, *a*-verbs.

A-verbs: ja 'touch', *lo* 'want', *la* 'believe', *li* 'take', *lawe* 'brag', *njia* 'quarrel', *lolo* 'hate', *ngi* 'remember', and *waa* 'bring', etc.

(5)   a. Peter la-i-lɔ   *(**a**) **ndupu-i-sia**
           Peter believe- PST-ASP   A child-DEF-PL
           'Peter believed the children

- Property 1: Post-verbal object
- Property 2: Preceded by *a*

    b. *Peter **(a) ndupu-i-sia** la-i-lɔ
        Peter A   child-DEF-PL believe- PST-ASP
       'Peter believed the children

- Object cannot be pre-verbal

    c. *Peter **ndupu-i-sia** la-i-lɔ   **a**
        Peter child-DEF-PL believe- PST-ASP A
       'Peter believed the children

- *A*-particle cannot be stranded

(6)   *Peter majia-i-lɔ   / negeya-i-lɔ / lɔ-i-lɔ   / nguwa-i-lɔ   / gbafa-i-lɔ   a nike-i-sia
       Peter sell-PST-ASP / buy-PST-ASP / see-PST-ASP / wash-PST-ASP / insult-PST-ASP A cow-DEF-PL
       'Peter sold / bought / saw / washed / insulted the cows'

- *A*-verbs are generally lexically idiosyncratic (I'll look later at a few counter-examples)
- Canonical verbs cannot have post-verbal direct objects

4.1.1   Function of the a Particle

Mende is canonically postpositional, except for the preposition *a*. It occurs post-verbally in three other relevant contexts:

(7)   Peter yenge-i-lɔ   a **Mary kɛ Lawrence** kpaa hun   *(Introduces a Comitative Object)*
       Peter work-PST-ASP A Mary and Lawrence farm on
       'Peter worked with Mary and Lawrence on the farm'

(8)   Peter yenge-i-lɔ   a **kali-i   kɛ koni-i**   *(Introduces an Instrumental Object)*
       Peter work- PST-ASP A hoe-DEF.SG and axe-DEF.SG
       'Peter worked with the hoe and the axe on the farm.'

(9)   Peter Mary gɛ-i-lɔ   a **Tommy**   *(Introduces a Goal)*
       Peter Mary introduce- PST-ASP A Tommy
       'Peter introduced Mary to Tommy'

- Category: *a* seems to be a preposition
- Semantic meaning is unclear

4.1.2   Case in Mende
(10)   Peter **ti**   lɔ-i-lɔ   *(Canonical Object Pronoun)*
       Peter 3PL see-PST-ASP
       'Peter saw them (Mary and Lawrence)'

(11)   **ti**   Peter lɔ-i-lɔ   *(Canonical Subject Pronoun)*
       3PL Peter see-PST-ASP
       'They (Mary and Lawrence) saw Peter'

(12)   Peter la-i-lɔ   a **tiye**   *(A-object Pronoun)*
       Peter believe-PST-ASP A 3PL
       'Peter believed them (Mary and Lawrence)'

- Case is not marked in Mende, except on pronouns.
- A different paradigm of pronouns is used for *a*-objects.

   Conclusion: The *a*-prepositon assigns case to the direct object

4.1.3   The a-object as Complement
(13)   a. ngi ja-i-lɔ   a **nike-i-sia**
          1SG touch-PST-ASP A cow-DEF-PL
          'I touched the cows'

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b. ngi ja-i-lɔ   **a nike-i-sia**   a koni-i-sia
   1SG touch-PST-ASP A cow-DEF-PL   A axe-DEF-PL
   'I touched the cows with the axes'
   *'I touched the axes with the cows'

c. ngi ja-i-lɔ   **a koni-i-sia**   a nike-i-sia
   1SG touch-PST-ASP A axe-DEF-PL   A cow-DEF-PL
   'I touched the axes with the cows'
   *'I touched the cows with the axes'

- Only the *a*-string adjacent to V interpreted as theme/patient
- Conclusion: *a*-object merged as sister to V

Correlations:

- Post-verbal: dummy preposition a

- Pre-verbal: no dummy preposition

- Two different sets of lexical verbs

Koopman (1984, 1992) on Bambara: DO raises to preverbal position for Case.

Proposal for Mende: **DO raises to preverbal position for Case = canonical Verb**

OR

DO remains in merge position and dummy P inserted = *a*-Verb

4.2   Unergatives with Cognate Direct Objects

A class of unergative verbs that permit their cognate direct object to either precede or follow the verb.

ngele 'smile', *tiso* 'cough', *pindɛ* 'jump', *pimɛ* 'run', *jia* 'walk', *hambo* 'yawn', *lapi* 'fight', *ndaapi* 'swim', etc.

(14)   Peter {(*a) **ngɛlɛ jɛmbɛ**} yɛlɛ-i-lɔ   {a **ngɛlɛ jɛmbɛ**}
        Peter { A smile big}   smile-PST-ASP {A smile big}
        'Peter smiled a big smile'   (yɛlɛ = mutated form of ngɛlɛ)

(15)   Peter {(*a) **pindɛ jɛmbɛ**} windɛ-i-lɔ   {a **pindɛ jɛmbɛ**}
        Peter   A jump big   jump-PST-ASP A jump big
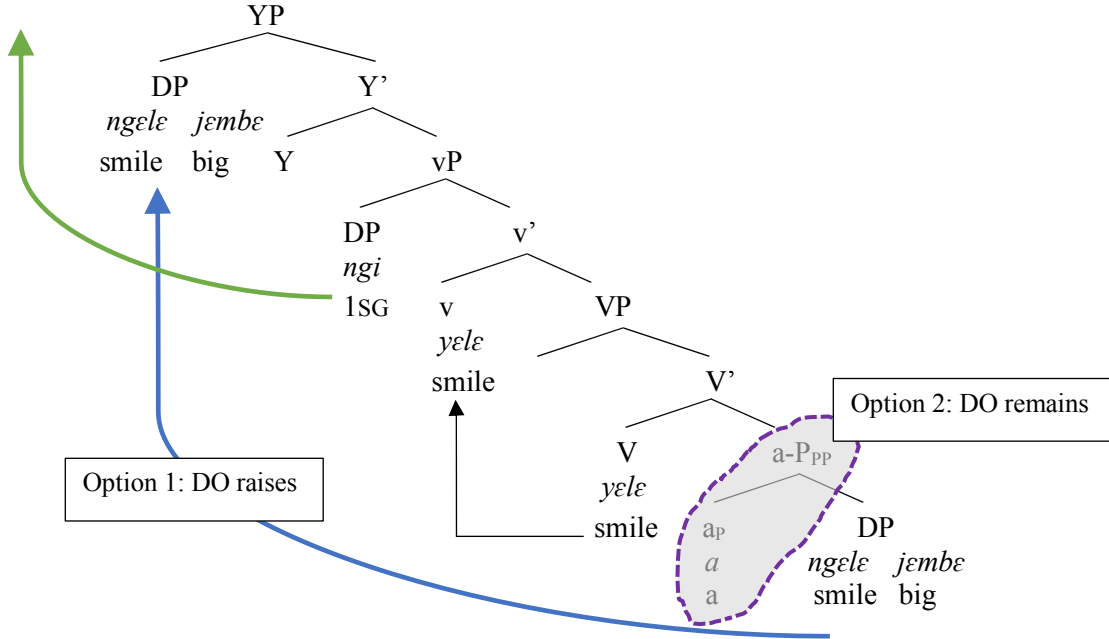   'Peter jumped a big jump'   (windɛ = mutated form of pindɛ)

- Generalization: post-verbal object introduced by *a*
- Generalization: pre-verbal object cannot be introduced by *a*

Analysis: Unergatives and Object Raising

- Pre-verbal object of unergative   (**a*) **and** bare object
- Post-verbal object of unergative = *(*a*) **and** *a*-object

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(16)

Unergative Verbs with Cognate Objects

Tree (16): YP → DP [*ngɛlɛ jɛmbɛ* / smile big] and Y'; Y' → Y and vP; vP → DP [*ngi* / 1SG] and v'; v' → v [*yɛlɛ* / smile] and VP; VP → V' ; V' → V [*yɛlɛ* / smile] and a-P_PP (Option 2: DO remains) → a_P [*a* / a] and DP [*ngɛlɛ jɛmbɛ* / smile big].

Option 1: DO raises
Option 2: DO remains

By-now familiar Correlations:

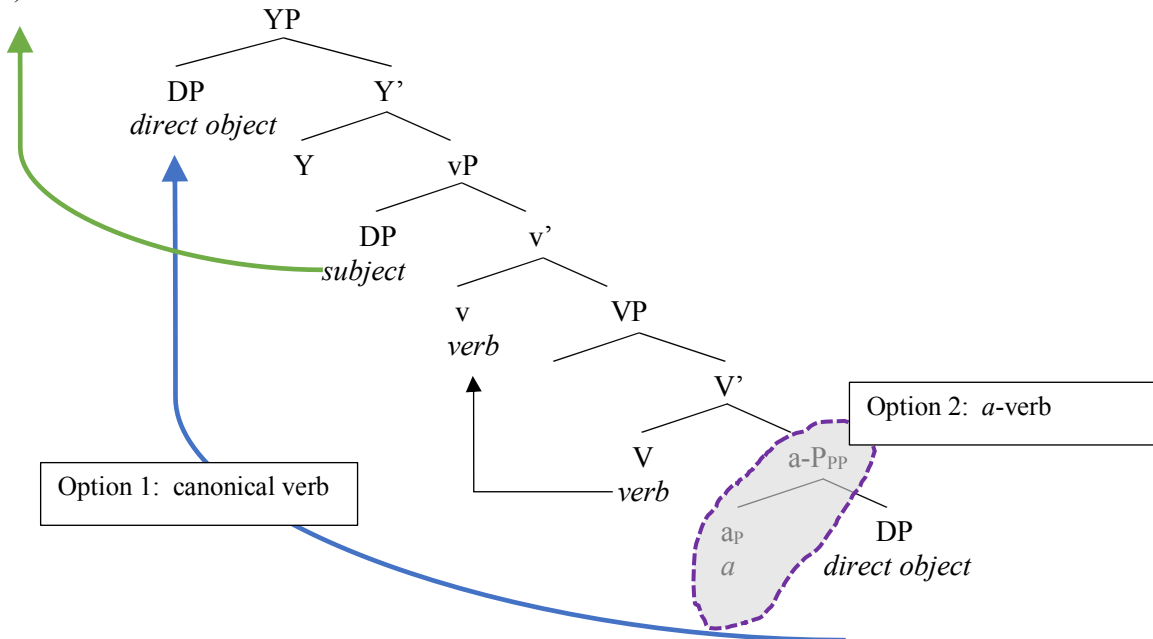|	
Unergative verb / Canonical verb	= (*a) **And** pre-verbal bare object
Unergative verb / *a*-verb	= *(a) **And** post-verbal *a*-object

Analysis in a nutshell:
- *Surface patterns for A-verbs and canonical verbs arise from the same processes as unergatives.*
- *OV is derived from VO.*

(17)   Canonical Verbs and A-Verbs

Tree (17): YP → DP [*direct object*] and Y'; Y' → Y and vP; vP → DP [*subject*] and v'; v' → v [*verb*] and VP; VP → V'; V' → V [*verb*] and a-P_PP (Option 2: *a*-verb) → a_P [*a*] and DP [*direct object*].

Option 1: canonical verb
Option 2: *a*-verb

4.3   Stranded Quantifiers

(18)   the children will all sing
        [DP the children]will [VP [DP all [DP the children]] sing]

Given that only leftward movement is permitted, quantifier float is significant in showing the base position of the moved DP (Sportiche 1998, Fitzpatrick 2006).

If a quantifier can be floated in position X, then the associated DP must have been in position X at some point in the derivation.

(19)   a. ndopo-i   **sɛlɛ-i-sia   kpɛlɛ** me-i-lɔ   S [OQ] V *t*
            child-DEF.SG banana-DEF-PL all   eat-PST-ASP
            'The child ate all the bananas'

        b. ndopo-i   **sɛlɛ-i-sia**   me-i-lɔ   **kpɛlɛ**   S [O] V [*t*Q]
            child-DEF.SG banana-DEF-PL eat-PST-ASP all
            'The child ate all the bananas'

- Direct object and quantifier both raise into pre-verbal position (like a canonical verb)
- Direct object can raise while quantifier is stranded (like an *a*-verb)

5.   Conclusions

Mende:
- Both pre-verbal (canonical verbs) and post-verbal (*a*-verbs) direct objects
- They differ in how they assign case to their object (Koopman (1984, 1992)
- Their behavior is reflected in the two positions of cognate direct objects of the class of unergative verbs.
- Quantifier Float points to the direct object having been in a post-verbal position.
- Mende's SOV surface order is derived from an underlying SVO order

Other evidence to be considered:
- Other post-verbal object constructions
- Binding

Further Research:
- Post-verbal objects in related Mande languages (Loko, Bandi, etc.)

wu siɛ
(thank you)

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