

A Typological Description of Word Order-Rules in Kurdish (Ilami Dialect)

Shahla Sharifi

Associate professor in linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

E-mail: sh-sharifi@um.ac.ir

Amir Karimipour (Corresponding author)

MA student in Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

E-mail: am_ka439@stu-mail.um.ac.ir

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Abstract

In this paper, we try to focus on word order variation in the light of the Linearization Hierarchy in Ilami dialect. Several hierarchies have been suggested in this regard. It should be noted that this topic has been discussed in different languages, including English and Persian. We will try to show how Kurdish deal with these so-called “universal hierarchies” and to what extent they are observed in practice. We will see that although Ilami observes some of these rules considerably, asymmetries are also found in this dialect of Kurdish. Nevertheless, mismatches do not necessarily result in producing ungrammatical structures, but only marked ones.

Keywords: Typology, Word order, Hierarchy, Kurdish, Markedness

1. Introduction

Typology is a branch of linguistics which studies the structural similarities between languages, regardless of their history, as part of an attempt to establish a satisfactory classification, or typology of languages. Typological comparison is thus distinguished from the historical comparison of languages- the province of Comparative Philology and Historical Linguistics- and its grouping may not coincide with those set up by the historical method (Crystal, 2003). Word order typology, as a main branch of typology, is now considered as one of the most important fields of typological research. Although an awareness of a relationship between the order of verb and object and other word order characteristics dates back to at least the nineteenth century, it is the work of Greenberg (1963) that is generally viewed as marking the beginning of an interest in word order typology. The basic idea of word order typology is that there is an association or correlation between a numbers of word order characteristics, so that given a single word order characteristic of a language, like the order of verb and object, one can predict, at least in a statistical sense, a variety of other characteristics of the language.

word order typology and the notion of markedness are tightly interconnected. In other words, basic word orders are considered as unmarked patterns, based on which unmarked and natural structures are produced. As soon as they violate such hierarchies in any language, they are tagged as “marked structures”.

In this article we aim to focalize word order rules in Kurdish. Indeed, we will try to distinguish marked and unmarked structures in different contexts. As far as we know, no prominent work is done to study word order rules in Kurdish or Ilami (as a dialect of Kurdish). So, we decided to study Ilami to show how and which structures are considered as marked or unmarked in this dialect. In order to collect and analyze our data, we got help from one of the authors’ linguistic intuition, as a native speaker of Ilami.

Language universals and linguistic typology is a widely studied topic. Hartsuiker et al (1999) hypothesized the existence of a linearization process, which imposes order on a constituent structure. They assume that this structure is specified with respect to hierarchal relations between constituent but not with respect to word order. They tested this hypothesis in a primed picture description experiment. And finally they argue that their results support the notion of a linearization process and reject the alternative explanation that the results should be attributed to persistent selection of a fully specified syntactic frame. Vigliocco & Nicol (1998) address the question whether hierarchical relations and word order can be separated in sentence production. Based on their experiments they argue that a stage in language production in which a syntactic structure is built prior to a stage in which words are assigned to their linear position. Here we refer to some other typological works: Comrie (1989), Croft (1990)

Downing & Noonan (1995), Dryer (1997), Greenberg (1974), Greenberg, et al (1978), Horne (1966), Mallison & Blake (1981), Pullum (1981), Shibatani & Bynon (1995), Shopen (1985), Song (2000), Vogel & Comrie (2000), Whaley (1997).

Present topic has been studied in Persian too. Sharifi (2004) points out some findings about word order rules in contemporary Persian. For example, she claims that Persian tends to be post-field, that is subject preferably comes before other constituents like object, etc. She also rejects full observance of Persian to the above rules (hierarchies), by illustrating some counterexamples. She argues that movements do not necessarily lead to producing ungrammatical sentences; but uttered structures simply seem to be marked and less natural.

2. An introduction to Kurdish

Kurdish as a new western Iranian language has speakers dispersed within broad regions of Iran, from west (Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam) to the east (Khurasan), (Gunter: 2004, xxv-xxvi). This language has two main dialect groups. The northern group spoken from Mosul, Iraq, into the Caucasus, is called Kurmānji; in Turkey, Hawar (Turkized Latin) characters are used in the written form (Britannica).

Ilami, a less studied dialect, is one of the Kurdish varieties, and is widely spoken in Ilam, a small mountainous city located in the west of Iran. Ilami shares some features with Kermanshahi and Kalhori, unlike most Kurdish varieties, this dialect has no ergative system. (Kalbassi, 2010)

3. Theoretical Framework

Siewierska in his book (1988) proposes seven linearization hierarchies for English. Below, we list and shortly define each hierarchy:

3.1 The Familiarity Hierarchy

The notion of ‘familiarity’ in the sense used here is adapted from Ertel(1997), who defines it in terms of ‘closeness to the speaker’s cognitive field’. Familiarity is seen to be a relative notion dependent on variables internal to the speaker. It encompasses topicality, givenness, definiteness, referentiality, and perhaps temporal priority, but also purely idiosyncratic factors such as personal preference, emotive involvement, expertise in a given field, etc. (p 61)

3.2 The Topic > Comment Hierarchy

The term ‘topic’ will be used here in the sense of ‘what is spoken of’ or ‘what the utterance is primarily about’. The term ‘comment’ will denote what is said about the topic. In most discussions of discourse structure, it is customary to distinguish the part of the utterance that represents the most important or salient piece of information with respect to the pragmatic information between the speaker and addressee; such information will be referred to as the ‘focus’ (Dik 1978:149). (p, 64-65)

3.3 The Iconicity Hierarchy (=The Universal Sequencing Conventions)

The iconicity or experiential iconicity (Enkvist 1981) hierarchy expresses the preference for linearization patterns isomorphic to the temporal order of experiences or actions in the universe of discourse. It is conventional to interpret the linear order in which matters are

presented as representing actual temporal succession. Therefore following examples would normally be understood as depicting different sequences of events.

- a. We had a cup of coffee and went for a walk.
- b. We went for a walk and had a cup of coffee. (p, 79)

3.4 The Definiteness and Referentiality Hierarchy

Definiteness and referentiality correlate directly with givenness; definite constituents are assumed to be identifiable by the hearer; referential ones, though not necessarily already identifiable, are taken to exist, and to have a unique identity in the universe of discourse. Therefore the definiteness and referentiality are subsets of the given>new hierarchy. (p, 75)

3.5 The Person, Semantic Role and Social Status Hierarchy

3.5.1 Person

The order suggested for person is so:

1st p.>2nd p.>3rd p.human>higher animals>other organisms>inorganic matter>abstracts (p, 49)

3.5.2 Semantic Role

The eligibility of constituents bearing a particular semantic role for subject or object is represented in the following schema:

Subject: agent>patient>recipient>benefactive>instrumental>spatial>temporal

Object: patient>recipient>benefactive>instrumental>spatial>temporal (p, 49)

3.5.3 Social Status

Some names which seem to be socially higher are more probable to come first:

Men>women

Boy>girl

3.6 The Dominant Descriptor Hierarchy

Studies suggest that the denotata on the left are perceived as more significant or better than those on the right.

Positive>negative

Heavier>lighter

In>out

Host>adjunct

Bigger>smaller (p, 60)

3.7 The Formal Hierarchy

The investigation of the effect of the formal hierarchies on order will begin with Dik's (1978, 1984) insightful account of this issue captures in his Language Independent Preferred Order of Constituents Schema (LIPOC). LIPOC asserts that, the preferred location of an item to the left of < is before that of an item to the right of <.

I. clitic < pronoun < noun phrase < adpositional phrase < subordinate clause (p, 31)

4. Data Analysis

Here we represent some Kurdish examples for each hierarchy. In order to explain and clarify the examples more obviously, English literal and exact translations are given for each instance:

Table 1. The familiarity hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|---|---|
| ælijo xweʃke hətən ære ma ləman ali and sister his came for house | Ali and his sister came to our house. |
| zenawu bæʃele ʃəgən ære ter an zenaw and children her went for Tehran | Zenaw and her children went to Tehran. |
| xwæmu da ləgəm fərə wærdə jæk qəsə myself and mother my a lot with together spoke kərdim(ən) | My mother and me spoke together a lot. |
| da ləgu bawgəm fərə xuwən mother and father my a lot good are | My parents are very kind and lovely. |
| tatəgəm u zəne wærdə jæk nijeʃən uncle my and wife his together do not speak | My uncle and his wife are not on speaking terms. |

As we can see some names are likely to come before others and this can be partially the matter of familiarity. In fact nouns which are more familiar and naturally more focal come first. If we look at the first example, we will figure out that "Ali" is more familiar to the speaker/ listener than "his sister", thus it comes first. This general rule can be true about other examples too:

zenawu bæʃele ʃəgən ære teran.

zenaw > bæʃel

"zenaw" seems to be more familiar to the audience. It should be noted this does not mean "preposing" always makes ungrammatical sentences; however, new sentences may be less

natural and uncommon:

xweʃkejo **æli** hatən ære maʎman

bæʃʃeleu **zenaw** ʃʃægən ære terən. bæʃʃel > zenaw

We hinted to ‘familiarity’ as an important factor of determining where a noun should be placed in a sentence. But there are some examples that are difficult to be justified by familiarity criterion alone. In the following example, familiarity can be only one factor determining which noun comes first. Additionally, context and focus seem to be more effective:

daʎəgu bawgəm fərə xuwən

New structure is not only grammatical but also as natural as the first:

bawgu daʎəgəm fərə xuwən

It seems that in the former mother is focalized and in the latter father, and here familiarity is less consequential.

Table 2. Adjective sequence in kurdish

| Kurdish | English |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| malə tæmiz u ræjin u gərd u fərd House clean and beautiful and small and small | A clean small beautiful house |
| kərə dʒuwan aqəl boy young wise | A young wise boy |
| ləbas qərməzizə ræjine cloth red beautiful | A red beautiful shirt. |
| ʃamijə ʃərinə awdar watermelon sweet juicy | A sweet juicy watermelon |

In Ilami, it is not common to have a long sequence of adjectives alongside; it tends to use them separately by using conjunctions like “u” (and) after each adjective:

malə tæmiz **u** ræjin **u** gərd **u** fərd

Additionally, order is not very important when adjectives are considered. Indeed, adjectives can come before or after other adjectives to produce grammatical sentences:

ʃamijə **ʃərinə** awdar

ʃamijə awdarə **ʃərin**

Table 3. The topic > comment hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|--|--|
| sæid hade ta ewaræ bejaj said perhaps till evening come | Perhaps Said came back this evening |
| da lægəm də dəsəm narəhætə mother my from hand sad is | My mother is annoyed by me. |
| hadə bəfjəm hadə næfjəm perhaps go I perhaps do not go I | I may go. |
| kolə hadʒætələ furtəgə all of dishes the wahed | She has washed all the dishes. |
| diʃaw korə hæmsajəman də nam dʒəng an last night boy of the neighbor our in quarrel ʃælə pələw bi injure became | Last night, our neighbor's son was injured in a family quarrel. |
| dəngə dʒə dəjan nijə voice from them not is | I have not heard from them. |
| su fuwəki fjəm tomorrow morning go I | I will go tomorrow morning. |

Topic is an item that is usually known by the speaker/listener and it tends to come at the beginning of sentences as do “sæid” and “da lægəm” in the following examples:

sæid hade ta ewaræ bejaj

da lægəm də dəsəm narəhætə

It is obvious that these known names containing old information are mentioned first, and then we try to say some new information about them. We refer to this new information as the comment of topic:

sæid **hade ta ewaræ bejaj** → coming of Said

da lægəm **də dəsəm narəhætə** → annoyance of my mother

Subjects (topics) in the following instances are not overt; however they are still inferable via the verb endings:

kolə hadʒætələ furtəgə → **Pro ej (She)**

su fuwæki fʃəm → **Pro mə(I)**

We should say that topic in Ilami Kurdish is not necessarily matched with the subject of the sentence, it can take different functions as in the following examples, “kərə hæmsajæman” is the object of a passive verb and “jan” is the object of preposition:

diʃaw **kərə hæmsajæman** də nam dʒængan ʃælə pələw bi.

dængə dʒə də**jan** nijə

Table 4. The definiteness and referentiality hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|---|--|
| hæsænu kərə wærdə jæk dim hasan and son his together saw I | I saw Hasan and his son together. |
| saraw nādər wærdə jæk dʒæng kərdənə Sara and Nader together quarrel has done | Sara and Nader has had a quarrel. |
| dʒödʒəgu mərxe wærdə jæk sənəm a chicken and a hen together bought I | I bought a chicken and a hen. |
| aliju bæʃele hatən ære mə ləman Ali and children his came for house our | Ali and his children came to our house. |

In Kurdish, definite and referential nouns usually come first. Again it does not mean other forms are ill-formed:

a) **hæsæn** u kərə wærdə jæk dim

b) **kərə** ju hæsæn wærdə jæk dim

Although using indefinite words before definite nouns do not make an ungrammatical sentence, the output is rather unnatural. But this is not true about other forms:

a) When two nouns are both definite, order is not important:

saraw **nādər** wærdə jæk dʒæng kərdənə

nādəru sara wærdə jæk dʒæng kərdənə

a) When two nouns are both indefinite, order is not important:

dʒödʒəgu mərxe wærdə jæk sənəm

mərxegu **dʒödʒəge** wærdə jæk sənəm

Table 5. The iconicity hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|---|---|
| ʃæmæ jeʃæmæ ʃimən Saturday Sunday go we | We will go Saturday or Sunday |
| saæt ʃuwar pændʒ dijaʃ clock four five come she | She will come at 4 or 5 o'clock. |
| hatənu ʃəgən coming and going | To come and go |
| dæ maʎ ta danəʃga wə pa ʃu from house to university with foot goes | She walks from the house to the university |
| dæ ʃuwæki ta ewarə hamæ daw from morning to evening run I | I work round the clock |
| gjan damaw gjan sənəmæ soul given have soul gotten have | I have been in the agony of death |

In a sentence, items like numbers, weekdays, time, etc are placed in an ordered manner. For example ʃæmæ- jeʃæmæ is more common than jeʃæmæ- ʃæmæ:

ʃæmæ jeʃæmæ ʃimən.

It is also more probable to use the source (place or time) before the goal:

dæ maʎ ta danəʃga wə pa ʃu

ta danəʃga dæ maʎ wə pa ʃu (unnatural)

Table 6. The personal hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|--|---|
| dijækæ ælijo kərə dæ bazar dim yesterday Ali and son his in Bazar saw | Yesterday, I saw Ali and his son in Bazar. |
| mənu daʎəgəm me and mother my | My mother and me |
| mənu iwə me and you | You and me |
| wanu jan those and these | Those and these |

When “person” is considered, it does not matter which noun/pronoun comes first. In other words we cannot claim that “a” is more acceptable than “b” or “c” than “d”, except that the noun/pronoun coming first is probably more focalized:

- a) mənū iwæ
- b) iwaw mə
- c) mənū da |əgəm
- d) da |əgəmu mə

Table 7. Semantic role hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|--|--|
| æli maʃinæ ʃurt Ali car the washes | Ali washed the car |
| həsən kətawæ da döma wæ ræfiqe. Hesen book the gave back to library | Hesen turned back the book to the library |

Based on examples, we can claim that agents in Kurdish always come before other semantic roles. But following sentences are still grammatical, albeit less common:

həsən kətawæ da döma wæ ræfiqe. Agent>...> Recipient

kətawæ da döma wæ kətawæxanæ **həsən**. Recipient>...> Agent

Table 8. Social status hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| dijætu kore dere girls and boys has she | She has a daughter and a son |
| ʒənu pejag woman and man | A woman and a man |
| bawgu kor father and boy | Father and son |

Social status is not very affective in Kurdish. As we can see “dijæt” and “ʒən” which are expected to come after kor and pejag, are uttered before:

- a) dijætu kore dere
- b) bawgu kor

Table 9. The dominant descriptor hierarchy

| Kurdish | English |
|---|---------------------------|
| fæqæt biʃ "a" ja "næ" only say yes or no | Tell me Yes or No. |
| pöldaru bəpöl rich and poor | Rich and poor |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| dərzənu məfʃir Needle and thread | Needle and thread |
| gənu xu bad and good | Good and bad |
| xəsu xəraw good and evil | Good and evil |
| təngi u xwəʃi downs and ups | Ups and downs |
| rasu dəru truth and lie | Truth and lie |
| tjæl u ʃərin bitter and sweet | Sweet and bitter |

If we look at examples mentioned above, we can see that some of them are in accordance with the theory, which states constituents with positive sense come first:

Positive>Negative

- a) fæqæt biʃ "a" ja "næ"!
- b) xəsu xəraw
- c) pöldaru bəpöl
- d) rasu dəru

and the others are not: Negative>¹Positive

- a) gənu xu
- b) təngi u xwəʃi
- c) tjæl u ʃərin

This example is in accordance with the Host>Adjunct relationship:

- a) dərzənu məfʃir

Table 10. The formal hierarchy (Noun and pronoun order)

| Kurdish | English |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| xwegu ʃöjə herself and husband her | She(herself) and her husband |
| menu bəwgəm I and father my | My father and me |

¹ . This symbol is conventionally used to show order in an utterance.

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| x a ɫuwəmu j a n xöni jækən uncle and they bloody each other are | My uncle and they are enemies. |
|--|--------------------------------|

If we analyze sentences, to determine whether pronouns or nouns come first, we will recognize that pronouns are more likely to come first, but surely the other form is acceptable (even sometimes more natural as in example 2) yet:

1)

a) xweg u ʃöjə

b) ʃöjə u xwe

2)

a) a. janu xaɫuwəm xöni jækən

b. xaɫuwəmu jan xöni jækən

Table 11. The formal hierarchy (Noun Phrase and Prepositional Phrase order)

| Kurdish | English |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| ʃʷʃtə xuwe ærat senəm something good for you buy I | I will buy a surprising gift for you |
| qəsæ də ləm nəkæ speak near me do not | Do not trust me! |
| hæ xwæm zanəm ʃʷæ we biʃəm only myself know what to say him | Only I know what should tell to him |

Other part of the theory which claims that usually a noun phrase comes before a prepositional phrase (NP<PP), should relatively be accepted. Following instances show that most often NP<PP is true, but reverse is not rejected:

1)

a) a. ʃʷʃtə xuwe ærat senəm

b) b. ærat ʃʷʃtə xuwe senəm

2)

a) hæ xwæm zanəm ʃʷæ we biʃəm

b) hæ xwæm zanəm we ʃʷæ biʃəm

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we tried to show, to what extent Kurdish structures, i.e. sentences; phrases, etc are in accordance with the seven hierarchies proposed by Allan (1987) and Siewierska (1988). We saw sentences and phrases which observed the rules. This is why, “ʃæmæ jeʃæmæ ʃimən” is more probable to be produced than “jeʃæmæ ʃæmæ ʃimən” as an example of

iconicity hierarchy and thus unmarked. On the other hand, many other examples show that Kurdish structures break these rules repeatedly. It can be concluded that Kurdish word order is not that rigid, because it allows movements (at sentence or smaller levels) which can result in producing marked sentences or phrases which seem to be less natural (not necessarily ungrammatical). As we saw “adjective order” is totally flexible. It does not matter which adjective comes first or is nearer to the head (=noun). It is also concluded that the place of an item is not exclusively determined by a single hierarchy. It is more logical to accept that some of mentioned hierarchies are interconnected and consequently affect a sentence/phrase word order together. Thus they should not be considered separately, because they often interact to determine the place in which a constituent can come. If we analyze “*ælijo xweſke hatæn ære maſman*” attentively, we will see that it can be a parallel effect of referentiality, familiarity and definiteness on “Ali”, coming first.

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