

Word Order in Kokborok

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Abstract

This paper attempts to discuss the word order in Kokborok, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Bodo-Garo subgroup (Benedict 1972), which is spoken by 7, 61, 964 persons according to 2001 census of North-East India and Bangladesh. This paper discusses the various processes that are relevant for word order in Kokborok. This paper also discusses about Greenberg's linguistic universals which are relevant to the Kokborok language including determiners, numerals, suffixes, time and place adverbial, direct-indirect object etc.

Key words: Kokborok, word order, grammatical categories

Introduction

The present paper entitled “word order in Kokborok” shows the basic word order as subject object verb (SOV). Kokborok is a language spoken in all the parts of Tripura and some numbers can be found in Assam, Mizoram and the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. According to G.A. Grierson's *The Linguistics Survey of India* (1903 vol. 3 part II page-17), Kokborok belongs to Bodo-Naga subgroup of Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan language family with a population of 7, 61,964 (according to 2001 census) in North East Tripura, India. It has also close affinities with other languages like Bodo, Dimasa, Garo, Tiwa, Rabha, etc.

All the languages of the world have the basic word order typology. Logically there are six possible orders: SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV, and OVS (Greenberg 1963). Of these six, SVO, SOV, VSO are the dominant orders and the other three VOS, OSV and OVS are least dominant

or are rare. Kokborok agrees with some of the Greenberg's Universals statement that languages with normal SOV order are postpositional languages. The genitive precedes the governing noun, if a language has postpositions.

The following points given below discuss the various word orders in Kokborok.

1. Verb final

Kokborok is a verb final language and the order of the constituents is Subject Object Verb (SOV). Being an SOV language, the alternative word order in the language is Object Subject Verb (OSV). Consider the following examples:

(a) *aŋ mai ča -o*
 i rice eat PRE
 'I eat rice'

(b) *aŋ čibuk but^har -k^ha*
 i snake kill PST
 'I killed (a) snake'.

2. Order of direct and indirect object

If both the direct and indirect objects are present in a sentence, the indirect object precedes the direct object as given below with examples:

(a) *nait^hokti wak -no ada ri -k^ha*
 naithokti pig ACC food give PST
 'Naithokti gave a food to the pig'.

(b) *bo tak^hirai-no kot^homa sa -k^ha*
 he tak^hirai ACC story tell PST.
 'He/She told a story to Takhirai'.

3. Order of adverb and verb

In kokborok adverb precedes the verb as given below with examples:

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(a) *aŋ tərək-tərək tʰaŋ -kʰa*
 i slowly go PST

‘I went slowly’

(b) *aŋ dakti-dakti tʰaŋ kʰa*
 i quickly go PST

‘I went quickly.’

4. Order of conditional and main clause

Kokborok agrees with Greenberg’s Universal 14. According to Greenberg’s Universal 14, “**In conditional statements, the conditional clause precedes the conclusion as the normal order in all languages**”. Consider the following examples:

(a) *aŋ tʰaŋ -kʰe bo tʰaŋ -nai*
 i go if he go FUT

‘If I go, he will go’.

(b) *čəŋ tʰaŋ -kʰe borog tʰaŋ -nai*
 we go if they go FUT

‘If we go, they will go’.

Examples (a) and (b) show that conditional clause precedes the main clause. Below example (c) and (d) will show that the conditional clause can also follow the main clause in Kokborok.

(c) *bo tʰaŋ -nai aŋ tʰaŋ -kʰe*
 he go FUT I go if

‘He will go, if I go’.

(d) *borog tʰaŋ -nai čən tʰaŋ -kʰe*
 they go FUT we go if

‘They will go, if we go’.

5. Time adverbial and place adverbial

Like other verb final languages, time adverbial precedes place adverbial in Kokborok.

Consider the following example:

aŋ nəŋ bai bəskəŋ -ni tal -o Tripura malai -nai
i you with front ABL month LOC Place meet FUT
'I will meet with you in Tripura next month'.

The above example *tal* 'month' is the time adverbial (T Adv) which precedes the place adverbial (P Adv) *tripura* 'tripura' in Kokborok.

6. Order of numerals

Like other verb final language numerals follow the head noun in Kokborok as given below:

(a) *k^hum bar t^ham*
flower CL three
'Three flowers'

(b) *səi mak t^ham*
dog CL three
'Three dogs'

7. Adpositions

According to Greenberg's Universal 4: "With overwhelming greater than chance frequency, languages with normal SOV order are postpositional".

Prepositions and postpositions are together called as adpositions. Like other verb final languages, Kokborok agrees with Greenberg's Universal 4 and has postpositions that follow the noun. Consider the following examples:

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(a) *tebel* *-o*
tebel on
'On the table'

(b) *aŋ bai p^hai -di*
i with come IMP
'Come with me'.

8. Genitive

"In languages with prepositions, the genitive almost always follows the governing noun, while in languages with postpositions it almost always precedes" according to Greenberg's Universal 2. Kokborok agrees with Greenberg's Universal 2 that the genitive precedes the governing noun, if a language has postpositions. Consider the following examples:

(a) *boloŋ -ni tok*
jungle GEN bird
'Jungle's bird'.

(b) *tok^hirai -ni nok*
tok^hirai GEN house
'Tokhirai's house'.

9. Adjectives

According to Greenberg's Universal 5: "If a language has dominant SOV order and the genitive follows the governing noun, then the adjective likewise follows the noun."

Kokborok agrees with Greenberg's Universal 5 that adjective follows the noun. Consider the following examples:

(a) *čibuk kolok*
snake long

‘Long snake’

(b) *bəɾəi* *sitra*
girl ugly
‘Ugly girl’

10. Determiners

Determiners precede the head noun in Kokborok. Consider the following examples:

(a) *o* *čəla*
this boy
‘This boy’

(b) *ah* *čəla*
that boy
‘That boy’

11. Suffix

According to Greenberg’s Universal 27: “If a language is exclusively suffixing, it is postpositional; if it is exclusively prefixing, it is prepositional”.

Since Kokborok is a postpositional and verb final language; it also has many suffixes which are suffixed to the word classes. Consider the following examples:

(a) *malk^huŋ* *tola* *kəlai* *-k^ha*
car down fall PST
‘Car fell down’.

(b) *nəŋ* *mai* *ča* *-di*
you rice eat IMP
‘You eat rice’.

12. Conclusion

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It is seen that Kokborok agrees with some of the Greenberg's linguistic universals. It has postpositions and its basic word order is SOV.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis.

1. The basic word order is SOV and the alternative order is OSV.
2. Syntactically, the indirect object precedes the direct object.
3. Adverb precedes the verb.
4. Time adverbial precedes the place adverbial.
5. Numerals follow the head noun in Kokborok.
6. Postpositions follow the noun.
7. Kokborok agrees with Greenberg's Universal 2 that genitive precedes the governing noun if a language has postpositions.
8. Kokborok also follows Greenberg's Universal 5 that adjective follows the noun.
9. Determiners precede the noun in Kokborok.

Symbols and abbreviations

SOV	subject object verb	FUT	future
OSV	object subject verb	ACC	accusative
SVO	subject verb object	ABL	ablative
VOS	verb object subject	LOC	locative
OVS	object verb subject	T. Adv	time adverbial
VSO	verb subject object	P. Adv	place adverbial
PRE	present	CL	classifier
PST	past	IMP	imperative
GEN	genitive		

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