Basic constituent order and information-structural functions of constituent order variation in Savosavo (Papuan) and Gela (Oceanic) corpus data
Claudia Wegener

While for some languages it may not make sense to posit a basic (or unmarked) constituent order ('pragmatically based languages', e.g. Cayuga, Mithun (1992: 58)), for others it is possible, and different criteria have been used to identify which constituent order is basic. Downing (1995) remarked that, from a functionalist perspective, there are competing cognitive motivations for different word orders (e.g. theme-first or rheme-first principles, Downing 1995: 13f.), and "because of the existence of competing, equally well-motivated options, we cannot *predict* which option a given language may choose" (Downing 1995: 3, emphasis in the original). The fact that a basic constituent order can be identified in a language does of course not preclude the occurrence of other orders, usually in more or less clearly defined and restricted contexts. However, not all languages show the same amount of variation in constituent order, and the variation they show is not random: Steele (1978: 601) observed that languages with different basic constituent orders show different patterns of variation. As for the functions of constituent order variants, the close connection with information structural categories such as different types of topic and focus has been shown for many languages, e.g. Mayan (Aissen 1992), Cheke Holo (Palmer 2009), and Berber (Mettouchi & Fleisch 2010).

This talk explores the variation of constituent order in corpus data from two unrelated, but neighboring languages spoken in Solomon Islands, Savosavo (Papuan) and Gela (Oceanic). For both, basic constituent orders can be established: AOV/SV for Savosavo, and VOA/VS for Gela. Recordings from four different genres (narratives, procedurals, interviews and elicitation games) were selected and coded for constituent order and clause type (declarative, interrogative, imperative, cosubordinate or subordinate). The results show that, with respect of the ordering of the arguments in relation to the verb, there is much less variation in Savosavo than in Gela: in Savosavo, 96% of all arguments (pronominal NP or lexical NP) precede the verb, i.e. the verb-final order is quite strictly observed. In Gela, only 75% of NP arguments follow the verb.

Interestingly, the main reason for this lies not in what is different in these two languages, but in what is similar: while their basic word order seems to give preference to different functional motivations, both languages use particular positions at the beginning and end of the clause for similar purposes, i.e. to mark different types of topic and focus. In this talk I will describe the particular positions and their respective functions for both languages, and demonstrate how these shared information structural strategies explain the observed differences in constituent order variation.

References
Aissen, Judith L. 1992. Topic and focus in Mayan. Language 68:43-80.
Downing, Pamela. 1995. Word order in discourse. In *Word Order in Discourse*, eds. Pamela Downing and Michael Noonan, Typological Studies in language 30, 1-27. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Mettouchi, Amina, and Axel Fleisch. 2010. Topic-focus articulation in Taqbaylit and Tashelhit Berber. In *The Expression of Information Structure. A Documentation of its Diversity across Africa*, eds. Ines Fiedler and Anne Schwarz, *Typological Studies in Language* 91, 193-232. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Mithun, Marianne. 1992. Is basic word order universal? In *Pragmatics of Word Order Flexibility*, ed. Doris Payne, 15-61. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Palmer, Bill. 2009. Clause order and information structure in Cheke Holo. *Oceanic Linguistics* 48:213-249.

Steele, Susan. 1978. Word order variation: A typological study. In *Universals of Human Language, Vol. 4: Syntax*, ed. Joseph H. Greenberg, 585-623. Stanford: Stanford University Press.