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Word Order Variation in Kurmanji Ditransitive Constructions

The placement and the realization of the indirect object (IO) with respect to the direct object (DO) and the verb in Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), a flexible OV language, is subject to variation. The IO can precede the DO, occur between the latter and the verb, or even be realized post-verbally. Although the latter placement has been the focus of several studies, the preverbal word-order variation involving the IO has mostly gone unnoticed. The phenomenon is however worthy of investigation, given that similar word order variations in other languages (OV or VO) have highlighted the relevance of ‘heaviness’ (length/complexity) and/or definiteness in the ordering preferences between the DO and the IO. In this study, through a corpus-based approach, i) we measure the pre and postverbal distribution of IOs regarding their semantic role, and ii) investigate the role of the mentioned parameters in ordering preferences between the DO and the additional IOs in the preverbal domain. Results of a follow-up experimental study will be reported subsequently.

Since the majority of previous studies have mainly relied on the verb *dan* 'to give' in their investigations on ditransitive constructions in Kurmanji, the DO-V-IO order is assumed to be the canonical order. Yet, Herkenrath (2018) tackles the idea that the verb *dan* is a straightforward touchstone for identifying ditransitive clauses in Kurmanji due to its participation in the light verb and causative constructions. She classifies eight types of ditransitive constructions based on the realization and placement of the IO including several preverbal variations. Another study by Haig (2014) dealing with the regional preferences for the placement of IOs and the issue of areal contact also shows a tendency toward preverbal placement of the IOs in northern/northwestern dialects.

From a psycholinguistic account, among the many factors that might affect word order preferences, including ditransitive constructions, length (e.g., Hawkins 1994) and definiteness (van Bergen & de Swart 2009) have been shown to play a role. Moreover, in a series of corpus-based and experimental studies by Faghiri and colleagues (2018) on Persian ditransitive constructions, they have showed the significant effect of these variables on the preferential word orders. These results are helpful to the present investigation considering that both Kurmanji and Persian share many common features, especially in the domain of word order.

To build our dataset, we used *Pewan* corpus (Esmaili & Salavati 2013) which is a large-scale text collection comprised of news articles from two online news agencies, namely Peyamner and VOA. For our study, we specified three verbs of *girtin* 'to take', *şandin* 'to send', and *dan* 'to give' and extracted the total number of 500 clauses (300 for *girtin*, 100 for *şandin*, and 100 for *dan*). Out of this sample, 224 clauses contained both a DO and an IO which were tagged for the word order, length (in number of words) and definiteness.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the three possible word orders are observed in our sample. The most frequent order is the DO-IO-V (63%), followed by DO-V-IO (28%) and IO-DO-V (9%). Regarding IO's semantic role, i) recipients (goals) are found in all of the positions, yet the overall preverbal frequency is higher compared to the postverbal occurrences. ii) All source IOs appear preverbally and almost exclusively in the DO-IO-V order.

	Goal	%	Source	%	Total	%
Postverbal	62	1.00	0	0.00	62	0.28
Preverbal	117	0.72	45	0.28	162	0.72
DO-IO-V	97	0.83	44	0.98	141	0.63
IO-DO-V	20	0.17	1	0.02	21	0.09
Total	179		45		224	

Table 1. Word order distribution by IO's semantic role

We observe that (relative) length is a relevant factor in determining ordering preference in the preverbal domain (for ditransitive clauses) of Kurmanji as well (see Fig. 1). In the IO-DO-V order, IOs are in average almost three words longer than DOs (the mean values are respectively -1.83 and -4.32). The statistical analysis of the data (excluding the postverbal option), shows a significant effect of the relative length (Est. 0.72, $p < 0.001$) corresponding to the "long-before-short" preference, in line with other SOV languages. Furthermore, Fig. 2 shows that the distribution of word order is also sensitive to the definiteness of the DO (here as a binary variable, with -definite including bare and indefinite objects). The statistical analysis shows a significant effect in favor of the DO-IO order when the DO is definite (Est. 1.4, $p < 0.01$).

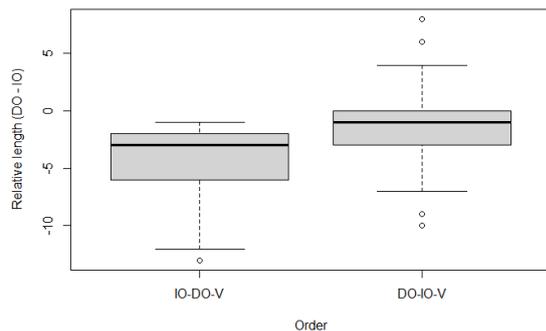


Fig. 1: Word order by relative length

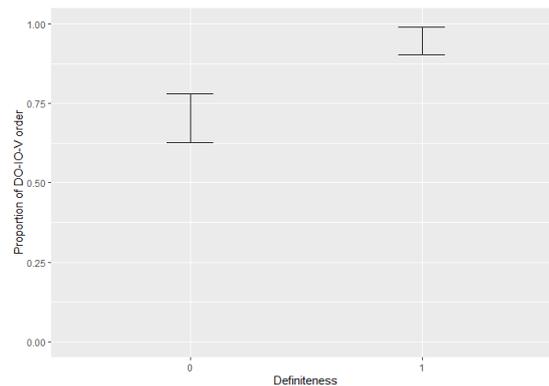


Fig. 2: word order by definiteness

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