

## OV/VO variation within a genealogical subgroup: The case of Mbam Bantu

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In this talk I present variation between OV and VO constituent order in the Mbam Bantu (Niger-Congo) subgroup of languages spoken in central Cameroon as a case study of OV/VO variation in languages of West/Central Africa. Based primarily on original field data, I show that there are four types of constituent order patterns in Mbam Bantu (1).

### (1) Constituent order types in Mbam Bantu

- i. Consistent VO (Sanaga Mbam)
- ii. OV/VO alternation based on pronominal/nominal status (Nomaandé [lem])
- iii. OV/VO alternation based on TAM context (Atomb [tff], Nyokon [nvo])
- iv. Consistent OV (Tunen [tvu])

Given this synchronic variation in constituent order within a group of very closely-related languages, the question is: What diachronic scenario(s) link(s) these constituent order types? A further topic of interest is the extent to which TAM-driven OV/VO alternations in Western Mbam (type iii) parallel the TAM-driven OV/VO alternations found in West African languages.

I propose that consistent OV order in Tunen [tvu] (type iv) is a recent development (Kerr 2024a, b) that most likely arose from a generalisation of an alternation based on pronominal/nominal status (type ii), as currently found in languages such as Nomaandé [lem] as well as various other Bantu zone A languages of central Cameroon, i.e. (\*SVOX →) \*SO<sub>Pm</sub>VX/SVO<sub>NPX</sub> → SOVX. Such SO<sub>Pm</sub>VX/SVO<sub>NPX</sub> patterns can in turn be related to information structure-conditioned word order variation (Kerr 2024a, b; see Güldemann 2007), which may in turn derive from a VO base system (type i). For the TAM-based systems found in Atomb [tff] and Nyokon [nvo] (type iii), as well as the neighbouring Bantoid language Tikar [tik] (Stanley 1997; Kerr 2024c), I highlight the present progressive as a potential bridge construction, raising a potential parallel with word order change in West African languages.

### References

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