

Verb-Second in Brazil: Raising Questions of Typology and Methodology

Verb-second has been most extensively analyzed in the archetypal form present in almost every Germanic language, where finite verbs obligatorily occupy the second constituent in a main clause (Holmberg 2015:1). However, due to a number of subtle subdivisions within the category of V2, and the dependence of typology on the fluid results of theoretical analysis, there is hardly a well-accepted typology of V2. Recent research in Old Spanish V2 has demonstrated a need for “a more refined understanding of V2 ... cross-linguistically” (Wolfe 2015:148). Treating V2 as a broad, amorphous category, or even worse, a parameter of its own, proves insufficient to explain fine-grained variation and diachronic development (Bruening 2016:20), and as such recent descriptions treat V2 as the result of specific overlapping syntactic properties of a language (Holmberg 2015:39).

I argue that this featural approach to V2 typology is vital to avoid an essentialist view on V2 word orders. Karitiana, a Tupian language in the Arikém branch, frequently exhibits V2 word order (Storto 1999:143, Holmberg 2015:5), with a verb moving into the C (Storto 1999:143) and a “syntactically focused phrase” raising into the preverbal spec,CP (Storto 2003:412). However, Holmberg views Karitiana as a “borderline” case of V2, on objections that V3 and V1 word orders also readily present themselves (Holmberg 2015:5). However, Old English readily demonstrates V3 and V4 patterns (Bruening 2016:3) without being considered a “borderline” example.

I contend that Holmberg’s hasty classification of Karitiana appeals to an implicitly eurocentric understanding of what ‘real V2’ is supposed to look like. Looking closely at the features of Karitiana through Bruening (2016)’s feature-based V2 typology developed in light of Old English irregularities, Karitiana can be said to fit well in a typology of V2. I also consider where other languages in Brazil such as Gavião (Moore 1984) fit into a more generous understanding of V2. Lastly, I discuss how this feature-focused typology allows us to ask diachronic questions, such as why Karitiana seems to stand alone in the Tupi stock with a V2 word order; and how

understanding V2 outside of the Germanic archetype will provide justification for abstract analysis of verb-second and reconstructions of Proto-Germanic V2.

References

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