A tentative analysis of the OSV order in Wolaytta

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Wolaytta (Afroasiatic family or phylum, Omotic branch) is a language spoken in southwestern Ethiopia. The basic word order for transitive sentences is SOV. In this language, however, the occurrence of the OSV order is not unusual. There are two kinds of factors that drive the OSV order. One is pragmatically motivated, where the information structure plays an important role. The other is syntactically motivated. In this case word order acts as a device used to reduce the hearer’s burden in interpreting sentences or to avoid misunderstandings.

Keywords: Wolaytta, OSV order, Information structure, Pronoun, Complex sentence

1. Introduction
2. Factors behind the OSV order
3. Concluding remarks and remaining issues

1. Introduction*

Wolaytta is a language of the Ometo group, which belongs to the Omotic branch of the Afroasiatic family, or phylum. It is spoken in the Wolaytta zone, the administrative unit northwest of Lake Abaya in southwestern Ethiopia, about 400 km away from the capital city of Addis Ababa.

According to the census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia in 2007, there are 1,627,955 “mother tongue” speakers of the language. This figure represents slightly over 2% of the total population of the country, which consists of 73,750,932 people.¹

¹ The data were downloaded from the website of the Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (http://www.csa.gov.et/) on January 13, 2013.
Morphologically, most words in Wolaytta consist of a lexical stem and a grammatical ending. As for syntax, the predicate verb agrees with the subject in terms of person, number, and gender. However, the subject is not an obligatory element of a sentence. The subject is marked by the nominative case (NOM), and the direct object by the absolutive case (ABS).²

The basic word order for transitive sentences in Wolaytta is SOV, as Ohman and Hailu (1976: 162), Adams (1983: 110), and Lamberti and Sottile (1997: 199-200) assert. This is supported by the fact that many SOV simple sentences were obtained by means of elicitation, in which I asked informants to freely construct sentences containing the transitive verbs I provided them. The following sentences are some examples of the utterances produced.

1. *Wogaac-ee* _mashsh-aa_ _posh-iis._
   blacksmith-NOM.SG.M knife-ABS.SG.M forge-PFV.3SG.M
   ‘The blacksmith forged the knife.’

2. *Gawar-ay* _ecer-iya_ _kaall-iis._
   cat-NOM.SG.M mouse-ABS.SG.M follow-PFV.3SG.M
   ‘The cat followed the mouse.’

3. *Kaw-oy* _kays-uwa_ _kaqq-iis._
   king-NOM.SG.M thief-ABS.SG.M hang-PFV.3SG.M
   ‘The king hanged the thief.’

The claim that the Wolaytta basic word order is SOV is also supported by the fact that the SOV order is used at the beginning of texts, for example, when there are no preceding contexts.

4. *Heezz-u* _kays-oti_ _iss-i_ _miizz-tyo_ _wuuqq-idosona._
   three-OBL thief-NOM.PL one-OBL cow-ABS.SG.F steal-PFV.3PL
   ‘Three thieves stole a cow.’ (Getachew 2006: 17)

5. *Beni* _naati_ _genn-uwa_ _kaa’-oosona._
   past children.NOM hockey-ABS.SG.M play-IPFV.3PL
   ‘In the past, children used to play a hockey-like game.’ (Getachew 2006: 19)

² For the details of the grammar of Wolaytta, see Wakasa (2008; 2014).
(6) Iss-i bitan-ee heezz-u naata yel-iis.
one-OBL man-NOM.SG.M three-OBL children.ABS bear-PFV.3SG.M
‘A person begot three children.’ (Getachew 2006: 25)

(7) Eero 1. Anjjull-a 2, Dani’el-a 3
Okay (person name)-ABS.M (person name)-OBL.M
Anjjull-a 4 g-ayo 5
(person name)-ABS.M say-REL.IPFV.NSBJ
asttamaar-ee 6 iss-o’yo 7 de’-iya-g-ee 8
teacher-NOM.SG.M one-NOM.SG.M exist-REL.IPFV.SBJ-NMLZ-NOM.SG.M
nay’a 9 iss-i 10 lo’-iya-r-o 11
child-OBL one-OBL be good-REL.IPFV.SBJ-NMLZ-ABS.SG.F
lo’-o 12 geela’-o 13 nay’-yo 14 stiq-iis 15.
good-OBL virgin-OBL child-ABS.SG.F love-PFV.3SG.M
‘Okay1. A teacher, who is called Anjula, Daniela Anjula, who exists (lit. *That
who8 a teacher 6 whom one says 5 Anjula 2, Daniela 3 Anjula 4, one 7 exists 8), has
loved15 a beautiful girl (lit. of child 9, one 10 that who is good11), a beautiful12
virgin13 girl14.’

However, in this language, it is not uncommon that transitive sentences show the OSV word order. From a typological point of view, this is very interesting, as cross-linguistically, OSV order is the least common basic word order, as Comrie (1981:32) and Tomlin (1986: 22) note3. In the following section, I attempt to list various factors that motivate the use of the OSV order, mainly using text data to do so.

2. Factors behind the OSV order

Roughly speaking, factors that motivate the OSV order in Wolaytta can be classified into two types: pragmatic and syntactic. The following discussion will list subclasses of each type.

The data used in this paper are mainly text materials. The first is Getachew (2006), who collected 127 Wolaytta tales. Because of time constraints, among other reasons, I was only able to use a small part of the book. The second is Mark, in New Testament. I used the Bible in Wolaytta published in 2002 as Geeshsha Maxaafa, by the Bible Society of Ethiopia, which is located in Addis Ababa. The third is text materials I collected during

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3 An anonymous reviewer noted that the OSV order as a non-canonical, rather than as a basic, word order, may not be uncommon cross-linguistically. Cross-linguistic study investigating the acceptability of and factors behind the non-canonical OSV order is beyond the scope of this article, but would be worth pursuing.
field trips conducted in 1998 and 2002. I also use some data obtained by means of elicitation. The notation of Getachew (2006) and the Bible in Wolaytta is altered for unification purposes, and their glosses and translations are mine.

It is important to note that the following description is rather tentative, because of the lack of fieldwork conducted to ascertain the validity of the hypothesis. I also do not argue that the factors listed below cause the OSV order without fail; rather, there would be many exceptions to the following description. In other words, the following should not be regarded as a description of rules, but of tendencies. Furthermore, as will be mentioned in 2.3, the factors are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can be compatible.

2.1. Pragmatically motivated OSV order

2.1.1. Information structure — old and new information

In the Wolaytta language, information structure may affect word order. As Kamei et al. (1996: 724) argue, items in a sentence are generally arranged in the order of “old information – new information.” Thus, if the direct object represents old information and the subject represents new information in a clause, it is unsurprising that the clause will show the OSV order.

The following example, which is taken from the very beginning of a text, illustrates this process. The direct object, representing old information, and the expression corresponding to it in the previous sentence are marked by a single underline, and the subject, representing new information, is marked by a double underline.

(8) Iss-i       bitan-ee       shaaf-a-n       boll-aa
     one-OBL   man-NOM.SG.M  river-OBL.SG.M-LOC  body-ABS.SG.M
meec-ett-iiddi     xeet-u       bir-aa
wash-PASS-SIM.3SG.M  hundred-OBL  Birr-ABS.SG.M
dog-idi            b-iis.
forget-CVB.3SG.M    go-PFV.3SG.M
Ha        bir-aa       har-a       ba-wu
   PROX   Birr-ABS.SG.M  other-OBL  REFL.3SG-DAT
og-iva       b-iya       as-i       demm-idi
road-ABS.SG.M  go-REL.IPFV.SBJ  person-NOM  find-CVB.3SG.M
ekk-idi         b-iis.
take-CVB.3SG.M  go-PFV.3SG.M

‘A man, while washing himself in a river, forgot a hundred Birr (currency unit), and left. Another man who was going on the road for himself found and took this money, and left.’ (Getachew 2006: 24)
The following, not taken from the beginning of a text, also clearly demonstrates this tendency.

(9) . . . ha’-i a shukk-a kess-i-shin
now-ADV she.NOM butcher-CVB.3SG.F make go out-SUBOR-while
ha a shukk-a ha tir-iya eee kilah-uwa ubb-aa-ppe
PROX liver-ABS.SG.M uh kidney-ABS.SG.M all-OBL.SG.M-ABL
ash-uwa kess-i-shin kess-i-shin
meat-ABS.SG.M make go out-SUBOR-while make go out-SUBOR-while
wozan-ay gakk-idaa-g-ee
her.ABS heart-NOM.SG.M reach-REL.PFV.SBJ-NMLZ-NOM.SG.M
lo’-i-n
be good-SUBOR-LOC
‘. . . now1, while she2 was butchering3 and taking out4, while she was taking out11 this5 liver6, uh7, kidney8, and meat10 from all kinds9, while she was taking out12, the heart14 reached15 her13 [and it (lit. *that which the heart reached her)] was good16, and16 . . .’

The following sentence also supports my claim, although the referents of the two expressions representing old information, servants and the one who went first, are not exactly identical.

(10) . . . B-iidi ekk-i eh-iite
go-CVB.2PL take-CVB.2PL bring-OPT.2PL
g-aada ashhkar-ata kiitt-aasu.
say-CVB.3SG.F servant-ABS.PL send-PFV.3SG.F
Kovr-o b-iidaa-g-aa mal-a-n
first-ABS go-REL.PFV.SBJ-NMLZ-ABS.SG.M near-OBL.SG.M-LOC
zin’-ida dem-ee
lie down-REL.PFV.SBJ giant snake-NOM.SG.M
mitt-i agg-iis.
swallow-CVB.3SG.M cease-PFV.3SG.M
‘Having said “. . . Go, and take and bring (it)!” she sent servants. A giant snake that had lain in the vicinity swallowed the one who went first immediately.’
(Getachew 2006: 20)

4 This is used as an auxiliary, which means ‘immediately’ and/or ‘once and for all’.
In the following example, the first sentence is a soliloquy and the rest is spoken to a hearer. Thus, the underlined object, *us*, is not old information to the hearer in the sense that its corresponding expression has been uttered before. However, its referents, the persons referred to by *nuna* ‘us’, the speaker and his company, are recognizable to the hearer from the time he was spoken to. In this sense, the underlined object in example (11) conveys relatively older information than the following subject, whose referent the hearer is unable to recognize or anticipate until the moment the word is uttered.

(11) Laa ha-g-ee oon-ee-shsha?
Hey           PROX-NMLZ-NOM.SG.M    who-INTER-(probability in question)
Hay          ta            ish-awu     ta
Well          my.OBL       brother-VOC.SG.M my.OBL
god-awu       nuna          ac-oy      tol-i-n
lord-VOC.SG.M us.ABS      debt-NOM.SG.M tighten-SUBOR-LOC

‘Hey, who would be this one? Well, my brother, my lord! We are troubled with debt (lit. debt tightens us), and . . .’

If neither the subject nor the object introduces new information, or in other words, if both of them represent old information in some sense, the old information introduced later—that is, the more activated old information—tends to appear first. For example, in the last sentence below, both the referents of the object *he-g-aa* ‘that one (in this case, the wood)’ and the subject *i* ‘he (in this case, the farmer)’ have been introduced in the preceding text. Thus, what conveys the more activated old information, that is, *he-g-aa*, precedes *i*, which results in the OSV order seen below. In the following examples, the direct object in the OSV clause, representing more activated old information, and its corresponding expression are marked by a single underline, while the subject in the OSV clause, representing less activated old information, and its corresponding expression, if any, are marked by a double underline.

(12) . . . gabar-ee naag-an-a-wu
farmer-NOM.SG.M watch-INF-OBL.SG.M-DAT
dandday-enn-a gishsh-a-wu
be able-NEG.INF-OBL reason-OBL.SG.M-DAT
. . . iss-i aduss-a mitt-aa ekk-idi
one-OBL long-OBL wood-ABS.SG.M take-CVB.3SG.M
he aduss-a mitt-aa boll-i
DIST long-OBL wood-OBL.SG.M body-ADV
The following is a similar example taken from the New Testament. Jesus is introduced in the foregoing text, and is therefore less activated here.

(13) . . . vaag-idi 1 qopp-idosona 2.
    say-so-CVB.3PL think-PFV.3PL

Eti 3 bantta 4 wozan-a-n 5.
    they.NOM REFL.OBL.3PL heart-OBL.SG.M-LOC

he-g-aa-dan 6 qopp-idoo-g-aa 7.
DIST-NMLZ-OBL.SG.M-like think-REL.PFV.NSBJ-NMLZ-ABS.SG.M

Yesuus-i 8 soh-uba-ra 9 ba 10.
Jesus-NOM.M place-OBL.SG.M-COM REFL.OBL.3SG

ayyaan-a-n 11 er-idi 12 . . .
spirit-OBL.SG.M-INS know-CVB.3SG.M

‘They thought2 that (lit. having said1) . . . Jesus8 knew12 at once9 in11 his10 spirit11
    that1 they3 thought5 in5 their1 hearts5 like that6, and12 . . .’
(Mark, Chapter 2: Verses 7-8)

Sentence (14) contains an appositive construction. The second apposed element here, he taarik-iya ‘that history’, can be viewed as more activated old information, and thus precedes the less activated subject, which refers to the speaker here.

(14) Ha”-i 1 he-g-aa 2 agg-idi 3 Wolaam-o 4.
    now-ADV DIST-NMLZ-ABS.SG.M cease-CVB.1PL (proper name)-ABS

g-iyo 5 suntt-ay 6 Wolaytt-a-kko 7.
    say-REL.IPFW.NSBJ name-NOM.SG.M (proper name)-OBL-ALL

waan-idi 8 laam-ett-idaakko 9.
    become what-CVB.3SG.M change-PASS-(marker for indirect question [PFV])
‘Now, we leave that (topic), and how the name called Welamo has been changed into Wolaytta, I want to tell that history.’

2.1.2. Other pragmatic factors to motivate OSV order

In (15), which describes the result of a random drawing, the OSV order seems to be used to emphasize the order of age among the brothers (‘The first son ... the second son ... the third son ...’). The direct object is marked by a single underline, and the subject is marked by a double underline.

(15) *He* saaxin-eta *saam-aa* maar-a-n
dist box-abs.pl lot-obl.sg.m order-obl.sg.m-ins
dooy-iyo wod-e
open-rel.ipfv.nsbj time- abs
bayr-aa bir-ay
first born-abs.sg.m birr-nom.sg.m
gidd-o na’-aa osh-ay
middle-obl child-abs.sg.m dung-nom.sg.m
kaal-uu biitt-ay gakk-iis.
younger-abs.sg.m clod-nom.sg.m reach-pfv.3sg.m

‘When those boxes were opened in the order of the result of a random drawing, the first-born son won the money (lit. the first-born son the money [lit. Birr (currency unit)] reach), the second son the dung, and the youngest son the clod.’

(Getachew 2006: 27)

In (16), the object seems to precede the subject because it is the focus of the answer for the previous question5.

(16) . . . Wogq-u *miishsh-aa* oytt-ay
how many-obl money-abs.sg.m deposit-inter.ipfv.2sg
g-i-n miishsh-aa shiiishsh-idi
say-subor-loc money-abs.sg.m collect-cvb.3pl
oyt-ett-idosona iss-oy iss-uwa.
deposit-pass-pfv.3pl one-nom.sg.m one-abs.sg.m

5 As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, this example might be viewed as an unexplained exception.
‘When he said “. . . How much money do you bit (lit. deposit)?”, they both (lit. one one [reciprocal]) collected and deposited money. When he said “I, I deposit (i.e., let us deposit) 100 Birr (currency unit) each (lit. 100, 100 Birr).” . . .’

2.2. Syntactically motivated OSV order

Although the following factors are syntactic, they should not be viewed as rigid rules, but rather as tendencies. The syntactically motivated OSV order is used to reduce the hearer’s burden in interpreting the sentence, or to avoid a misunderstanding deriving from complicated sentence structure.

2.2.1. Reflexive pronouns

Wolaytta has third person ‘normal (non-reflexive)’ and ‘reflexive’ pronouns. In simple sentences their difference is very clear, as Adams (1983: 269) says “…the form /ba/ ‘his’ [REFL] refers to the subject of the main verb of the clause in which /ba/ occurs, and excludes any other 3m [third person masculine] referent… /?a/ ‘his’ [not REFL] refers to someone other than the subject of the main verb of the clause in which /?a/ occurs…” His examples include the following sentences:

(17)  \[Baass-i \quad ba \quad keett-aa \quad b-iis.\]  
(person name)-NOM.M  REFL.OBL.3SG house-ABS.SG.M  go-PFV.3SG.M  
‘Bassa went to his own (= Bassa’s) house.’  (Adams 1983: 269)

(18)  \[Baass-i \quad a \quad keett-aa \quad b-iis.\]  
(person name)-NOM.M  his.OBL  house-ABS.SG.M  go-PFV.3SG.M  
‘Bassa went to his (= other than Bassa’s) house.’  (Adams 1983: 269)

In the following sentence, the reflexive pronoun functioning as the direct object of the subordinate clause, \(bana\) ‘himself’, precedes the subject, \(Geeshsh-a\) \(Ayyaan-ay\) ‘the Holy Spirit’.

(19)  \[Daawit-i \quad bana \quad Geeshsh-a \quad Ayyaan-ay\]  
(person name)-NOM.M  REFL.ABS.3SG  holy-ABS.NOM.SG  spirit-NOM.SG.M  

6 Actually, the non-reflexive pronoun can also be used here, though it may also refer to someone other than David and the Holy Spirit. For the referent of the third person pronoun in a subordinate clause, see Wakasa (2008: 440) or
haasay-iss-i-n "..." yaag-iis.
tell-CAUS-SUBOR-LOC say so-PFV.3SG.M

‘When the Holy Spirit made him (= David, lit. REFL) tell, he (=David) said, “...”
(i.e., David, by the Holy Spirit, declared “....”).’ (Mark, Chapter 12: Verse 36)

If the subordinate clause shows the SOV order (i.e., Geeshsh-a Ayyaan-ay ‘the Holy Spirit’
bana ‘himself’ haasay-iss-i-n ‘when he made tell’), it might be interpreted as ‘when the
Holy Spirit made himself (= the Holy Spirit) tell’, the reflexive pronoun being read as an
anaphor for its immediately preceding nominative noun (i.e., subject), just as in sentence
(17). The OSV order used here is a good device for avoiding such a misunderstanding.
The following presents a similar example.

(20)
Phexiroos-i 1  bana 2  Yesuus-i 3
(person name)-NOM.M REFL.ABS.3SG Jesus-NOM.M
“...” g-tidoo-g-aa 4
say-REL.PFV.NSBJ-NMLZ-ABS.SG.M
hassay-idi 5  dar-o 6  yeekk-iis 7.
remember-CVB.3SG.M much-ABS cry-PFV.3SG.M

‘Peter1 remembered5 that4 Jesus3 had said 4 to him 2 (= Peter, lit. REFL), “...,” and5
wept7 very much6.’ (Mark, Chapter 14: Verse 72)

In the following sentence pair obtained by means of elicitation, the OSV order is
acceptable while the SOV order is not. This is because the sequence of a subject pronoun
and a reflexive pronoun that differ in person and/or number is not preferable. Indeed, the
second person singular subject immediately followed by the third person reflexive object,
‘you himself’, seen in (21b), seems rather strange. Of course, the reverse order ‘himself
you’ is the same in this respect. Its acceptability, however, increases since the unmarked
OSV order gives us the impression that the fronted object is cut off from the SV cluster
(i.e., neeni bochch-enn-aa-dan) and is outside of the clause in question.

(21)7 a. Ba  miishsh-aa  neeni
REFL.OBL.SG money-ABS.SG.M you.NOM.SG
bochch-enn-aa-dan koyy-ees.
touch-NEG.INF-OBL.SG.M-like want-IPFV.3SG.M

‘He, does not want you to touch his money.’

7 In both (21a) and (21b), the reflexive pronoun can be replaced by the non-reflexive a ‘his(OBL)’, though the
meaning becomes ambiguous. See also note 6.
2.2.2. Quotation

In Wolaytta, a direct quotation is relatively rare. Instead, speakers employ a direct-indirect mixed quotation, in which a finite verb at the end of the quotation (and, if present, the subject noun phrase that the verb agrees with) is reported from the viewpoint of the speaker of the original utterance and the rest of the quotation from the viewpoint of the reporter. The following sentences provide examples.

\[(22)\]
\[\text{a. } \text{Nenaa-ra oott-ikke.} \]
\[\text{you.OBL-SG-COM work-NEG.IPFV.1SG} \]
\[(\text{Original utterance) } 'I \text{do not work with you.'} \]
\[\text{b. } \text{Tanaa-ra oott-ikke g-iis.} \]
\[\text{I.OBL-COM work-NEG.IPFV.1SG say-PFV.3SG.M} \]
\[(\text{Report of the hearer of (22a) to a third party not mentioned in (22a) } '\text{He said that he does not work with me.'} = '\text{He said, }'I \text{do not work with you.'}'' \]

Note that in (22b), the first person in \textit{tanaa-ra} ‘with me’ is from the viewpoint of the reporter (marked with dotted line) and the first person in \textit{oott-ikke} ‘I do not work’ is from the viewpoint of the original speaker (marked with undulating line). For details, see Wakasa (2013).

This direct-indirect mixed quotation may cause a puzzling structure, in which both viewpoints occur alternately.

\[(23)\]
\[\text{a. } \text{Taani omarss-i y-aada eta} \]
\[\text{I.NOM evening-ADV come-CVB.1SG them.ABS} \]
\[\text{maadd-an-a-wu dandday-ikke.} \]
\[\text{help-INF-OBL.SG.M-DAT be able-NEG.IPFV.1SG} \]
\[(\text{Original utterance) } 'I \text{cannot come in the evening and help them.'} \]
\[\text{b. } \text{Taani omarss-i y-aada inttena} \]
\[\text{I(NOM) evening-ADV come-CVB.1SG you.ABS.PL} \]
\[\text{maadd-an-a-wu dandday-ikke g-iis.} \]
\[\text{help-INF-OBL.SG.M-DAT be able-NEG.IPFV.1SG say-PFV.3SG.M} \]
Although (23b) is a perfectly grammatical sentence obtained by means of elicitation, such a puzzling utterance does not seem to be used in actual conversation. Instead, the quotation shows the OSV order to place the indirect parts of the quotation together in the beginning, and then places the direct parts of the quotation together at the end. The following sentences were also obtained by means of elicitation.

The structure of the quotation here is:

Indirect quotation (O) – Direct quotation (SV)

rather than

Direct quotation (S) – Indirect quotation (O) – Direct quotation (V).

Seemingly full direct quotations in this language often exhibit the OSV order, as seen below. We might think that such quotations are actually direct-indirect mixed quotations (See Wakasa 2013: 75). Hereafter, only O and S are underlined.

(25)  

He-g-aa-ppe simm-i-n aa-ssi
DIST-NMLZ-OBL.SG.M-ABL return-SUBOR-LOC him.OBL-DAT
macc-a as-a Xooss-ay medhdh-iis g-eettees.
female-OBL person-ABS God-NOM.SG.M create-PFV.3SG.M say-IPFV.1PL
‘We say, after that, God created a woman for him.’ (Getachew 2006: 11)
(26) *Mel-a* saaxin-iya taani ekk-ada
empty-OBL box-ABS.SG.M I.NOM take-CVB.1SG
waat-anee yaag-iis.
do what-INTER.FUT say so-PFV.3SG.M
‘He said, “I got an empty box, and what should I do?”’ (Getachew 2006: 27)

(27) Xalot-iya singg-iss-iyo wod-e
rue-ABS.SG.M sniff-CAUS-REL.PFV.NSBJ time-ABS
he xalot-iya singg-ida na’-ay
DIST rue-ABS.SG.M sniff-REL.PFV.SBJ child-NOM.SG.M
bajigam-omare abaraad-obare
go daft-after go daft-after
ha na’-aa goromoot-ee m-iis
PROX child-ABS.SG.M evil eye-NOM.SG.M eat-PFV.3SG.M
g-ees xal-iya ushsh-iya
say-PFV.3SG.M medicine-ABS.SG.M make drink-REL.PFV.SBJ
bitan-ee.
man-NOM.SG.M
‘When he makes him sniff rue, and if the boy who has sniffed, the witchdoctor (lit. man who makes drink medicine) says “The evil eye has eaten this boy.”’

This frequent OSV order in the direct-indirect mixed quotation affects the word order of genuine direct quotation. For an example of this, observe the OSV order found in the following genuine direct quotation found in texts.

(28) . . . Ne qa baqq-enn-a-n
you.NOM.SG furthermore slap-NEG-INF-ABS.SG.M-LOC
yayy-ada agg-a agg-i-kko
fear-CVB.2SG cease-CVB.2SG cease-SUBOR-if
miishsh-aa ta ekk-ana . . . g-i-n . . .
money-ABS.SG.M I.NOM take-FUT say-SUBOR-LOC
‘When he says, “…If you, without slapping, fear and give up (slapping), I will take the money…”’ …

(29) Chii ta baqq-ana kaw-ywa ta baqq-ana
no I.NOM slap-FUT king-ABS.SG.M I.NOM slap-FUT
2.2.3. Ambiguous personal pronouns

Wolaytta has several homophonous (non-reflexive) personal pronoun forms, as can be seen in (30). For example, ta may be ‘I.NOM’ or ‘my.OBL’, and i may be ‘he.NOM’ or ‘her.OBL’.

(30) Partial paradigm of Wolaytta personal pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ABS</th>
<th>OBL</th>
<th>NOM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>tana</td>
<td>ta(a) ~ tana(a)</td>
<td>ta(a) ~ ta(a)n(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>nuna</td>
<td>nu(u) ~ nuna(a)</td>
<td>nu(u) ~ nu(u)n(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>nena</td>
<td>ne(e) ~ nena(a)</td>
<td>ne(e) ~ ne(e)n(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>inttena</td>
<td>intte(e) ~ inttena(a)</td>
<td>intte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG.M</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a(a)</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG.F</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>i(i)</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, i + absolutive noun + verb can be read as ‘he (S) + Vt + O’ or ‘Vt + her O’, whereas absolutive noun + i + verb is not ambiguous, being read as ‘he (S) + Vt + O’, since in this language modifiers always precede their modified heads. This seems to be the cause of the OSV order in the following example.

(31) Ba-yyo₁₁       alaafetett-ay₂₁
REFL.OBL.3SG-DAT  responsibility-NOM.SG.M
de’-iyo₃       as-a-dan₄
exist-REL.IPVF.NSBJ  person-OBL-like
as-aa₅       i₆       tamaar-iss-iyo-g-aa-ppe₇
people-ABS.SG.M  he.NOM  learn-CAUS-REL.IPVF.NSBJ-NMLZ-OBL.SG.M-ABL
att-i-n₈      ...  pass-SUBOR-LOC

‘He₁₁ indeed teaches (lit. make learn)₇ people₅ like a man₄ who has responsibility (lit. responsibility₂ exists₃ for himself₁), but (lit. it passes₈ from that₇) ….’

Sentences (16), (28), and (29) can also be explained in the same way (cf. 2.3).
2.2.4. Complex sentences

In the following two examples, a relative clause appears first. Then, a semantically abstract nominal (nominalizer), which is the head of the relative clause and functions as the object, follows. After the nominalizer, the subject noun appears. Finally, the clause is closed by a transitive verb. The structure can be illustrated as \([S \ V(\text{REL})] \ O(\text{NMLZ}) \ S \ V]\).

In these cases, if the subject of an outer clause precedes the object and thus its modifying relative clause (i.e., \([S \ [S \ V(\text{REL})] \ O(\text{NMLZ}) \ V]\), two subject nouns may be adjacent and the subject and verb of the outer clause may be distant. These may bring about some difficulty in understanding the meaning of the sentence. The OSV word order can serve as a device for avoiding this difficulty.

\[(32) \ Ta \ ............... \ er-iyo-g-aa \ ............... \ inte \]

\[I. \text{NOM} \text{know-REL.IPFV.NSBJ-NMLZ-ABS.SG.M} \text{you.NOM.PL} \text{er-ekketa.} \text{know-NEG.IPFV.2PL} \]

‘You do not know (the fact) that I know.’   (Getachew 2006:12)

\[(33) \ Qaar-iya.1 \ ............... \ dar-o-b-a-n \ 2 \]

\[\text{vervet monkey-NOM.SG.F} \text{many-ABS-thing-OBL.SG.M-LOC} \text{wayss-a} \text{3} \text{wayss-idae-r-o} \text{4} \text{trouble-CVB.3SG.F} \text{trouble-REL.PFV.SBJ-NMLZ-ABS.SG.F} \text{na'-ay} \text{5} \text{he-g-aa-n} \text{6} \text{child-NOM.SG.M} \text{DIST-NMLZ-OBL.SG.M-LOC} \text{xoon-iis} \text{7} \text{yaag-ays} \text{8} \text{win-PFV.3SG.M} \text{say-IPFV.1SG} \]

‘I say\text{8}, then\text{6} the\text{5} boy\text{5} won\text{7} the vervet monkey that\text{4} trouble (the boy) and trouble (the boy) (lit. *that\text{3} the vervet monkey\text{1} troubled and\text{3} troubled\text{4}) in many\text{2} things\text{2}.’

In the example below, an object common to two verbs in separate clauses is placed at the beginning of the sentence. Their structure is illustrated as: \(O_{1,2} \ S_1 \ V_1 \ V_2\). This order renders the sentence to be more easily understood. For example, if sentence (35) showed \(S_1 \ O_{1,2} \ V_1 \ V_2\), the addressee would misinterpret the sentence structure, and would consider \(S_1\) to be the subject of \(V_2\). If the order were \(S_1 \ V_1 \ O_{1,2} \ V_2\), the object of \(V_1\) would still be unknown at the moment of utterance of \(V_1\).
2.3. Cooccurrence of factors

As suggested at the end of section 2.2.3, factors behind the OSV order introduced above can be compatible with one another. Thus, more than one motivating factor can be found in a single sentence. For example, the OSV order in (13) was explained in terms of relatively more activated old information, but it can also be explained in terms of relativized object (cf. 2.2.4). I explained the OSV order in sentence (16) pragmatically, but it may also be explained by considering the speaker’s desire to eliminate the ambiguity that would be caused by homophony seen in Wolaytta personal pronouns (cf. 2.2.3). Sentence (24b) was given as an example motivated by the quotation, but it can also be explained, at least partially, by the use of the reflexive pronoun (cf. 2.2.1). The OSV order of sentences (27), (28), and (29) were accounted for from the perspective of quotation construction, but note that (27) contains an object representing relatively activated old information (cf. 2.1.1), and (28) and (29) contain a pronominal subject (cf. 2.2.3). Sentences (33) and (35) were explained in terms of complex sentence structure, but at the same time they can be seen as examples that are motivated by the direct-indirect mixed quotation construction (cf. 2.2.2).

The matter of word order in Wolaytta is further complicated by the fact that these factors may contradict each other in one sentence. Further studies are required in order to understand how the word order is determined in such cases.
pragmatically motivated OSV order, information structure plays an important role. For example, the direct object representing old information tends to precede the subject representing new information, and thus the clause may result in OSV order. Likewise, the direct object representing relatively more activated old information tends to precede the subject representing relatively less activated old information (cf. 2.1.1). If an object is a focus of an answer to a question or an item that has been somehow emphasized, it may also precede the subject (cf. 2.1.2). The syntactically motivated OSV order is a device used to avoid misunderstandings derived from reflexive pronouns (cf. 2.2.1) or homophonous personal pronouns (cf. 2.2.3). It is also a device to reduce the hearer's burden in interpreting sentences with the direct-indirect mixed quotation, where only S and V are reported from the viewpoint of the speaker of the original utterance (cf. 2.2.2), or complex sentences, where more than one subject, object, and verb may appear (cf. 2.2.4).

However, the description remains tentative. This should be verified by means of controlled elicitation.

There are additional factors behind the phenomenon in question. For example, the verb *saamm*- ‘to make feel thirsty’ is often found with the OSV order in texts, such as sentence (35), as well as in elicitation. In Amharic, its semantically corresponding verb, *t'ämma*, is a so-called impersonal verb, whose grammatical subject is ‘it’, and the logical subject is expressed by the object suffix pronouns (Leslau 1995: 435). Thus, in the instance of sentence (35), it might be the case that the pronominal object *nuna* ‘us.ABS’ appears first because it is a ‘subject’, though it is a ‘logical subject’.

It is also important to note that I encountered many OSV sentences that were not captured by the motivating factors outlined in this paper. For example, the following is a sentence obtained by means of elicitation.

(36) *Dag-uwa oos-uwa moott-a*

  *communal labor-OBL.SG.M work-ABS.SG.M neighborhood-OBL*

  *as-ay maadd-iis.*

  *people-NOM.SG.M help-PFV.3SG.M*

‘The neighbors helped the communal labor.’

Properly speaking, this is a sentence elicited by asking my informant to “write” a sentence containing the verb *maadd*- ‘to help’. The purpose of the question was twofold: I aimed to ascertain the voice system of the word, as well as obtain written material by native

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9 In addition, as suggested by an anonymous reviewer, statistical work on text data should be done.
speakers. However, the reason why the informant used an OSV construction in that instance remains unknown, and requires further research.

**Abbreviations**

ABL (ablative postposition), ABS (absolutive [unmarked case for the direct object, predicate noun, etc.]), ADV (adverbial), ALL (allative postposition), CAUS (causative), COM (comitative postposition), CVB (converb), DAT (dative postposition), DIST (distal), F (feminine), FUT (future), INF (infinitive), INS (instrumental), INTER (interrogative), IPFV (imperfective), LOC (locative postposition), M (masculine), NEG (negative), NMLZ (nominalizer), NOM (nominative), NSBJ (non-subject oriented [used when the head of a relative clause does not function as the subject in the relevant relative clause]), OBL (oblique), OPT (optative), PASS (passive and reciprocal), PFV (perfective), PL (plural), PROX (proximal), REFL (reflexive), REL (relative), SBJ (subject oriented [used when the head of a relative clause functions as the subject in the relevant relative clause]), SG (singular), SIM (simultaneous), SUBOR (subordination marker), VOC (vocative), Vt (transitive verb), 1 (first person), 2 (second person), 3 (third person).

**Transcription**

In Wolaytta, attempts have been made to write the Wolaytta language using the Latin alphabet. This paper principally adopts the writing system used in school textbooks in Wolaytta. In general, the system is phonemic and each letter has the same sound value as its corresponding IPA symbol. However, note the following adjustments: c [ʧ], j [ʤ], q [k’], x [t’], y [j], ch [ʧ], dh (glottalized [d]), nh [h̃], ph [p’], r [ɾ], sh [ʃ], zh [ʒ], ’ [ʔ].

A sentence and a proper name begin with a capital letter. Though not used in writing by natives, hyphens (-) are inserted to indicate morpheme boundaries.

**References**


