ON DIRECTIONALITY AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE VERB PHRASE:
EVIDENCE FROM NUPE*

Abstract: We propose a movement account of why some verb phrases seem to be head-final in the Nupe language whereas others seem to be head-initial. Several converging arguments are given that verbs come before their complements in the underlying structure. Apparent counterexamples come from the presence of identifiable functional heads within the verb phrase structure that attract NPs to their specifier position. Two such heads are distinguished: Agro^0, which attracts an NP non-locally for purposes of licensing accusative case, and Infin^0, which attracts the closest NP to check an EPP feature regardless of whether it is case marked. We briefly compare our analysis to remnant movement analyses to sharpen the typology of leftward movement in natural language. We conclude that the success of Kayne’s (1994) approach to word order depends on uncovering and cataloging the triggers of these movements.

Key words: directionality, verb phrase, word order, movement triggers, feature checking, West African languages.

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The Nupe spelling employed in this article conforms to the modern orthography, and thus differs slightly from the classic orthographies of Banfield (1914) and Banfield and Macintyre (1915). In what follows, high tone is marked with an acute accent over the vowel and low tone by a grave accent. Mid tones are unmarked. Abbreviations used in the glosses of example sentences include the following: AGR, agreement; FOC, focus; FUT, future; ITER, iterative; LOC, locative; NEG, negation; PERF, perfect; PLUR, plural; PRES, present; PRT, particle; PURP, purposive.