The pragmatic word ordering in Bouyei

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1. Introduction

The Bouyei people are also known by the names *pu⁴ʔjai⁴, pu⁴ʔji⁴,* or *pu⁴ʔjoi⁴.* Yay [jei] is the most frequently used antonym of the Bouyei (Synder 1995). In Thailand Bouyei are known by the name Tai Dioi (Tai Yoi) which refers to the Bouyei people residing in Vietnam.

The Bouyei language belongs to the northern group of the Tai language family (Li 1960). It is spoken by a Tai ethnic group with a population of more than 2,500,000. In China the Bouyei people live in the south, the southwest, and the central parts of Guizhou Province; seventy percent of the total Bouyei population live in Qiannan and Qianxinan prefectures (Snyder 1995). A small number of Bouyei also live in Yunnan and Sichuan, China, and in the mountainous areas of northern Vietnam (Zhou et al. forthcoming).

The variety of Bouyei language used in this study is called Niuchang[1] Bouyei, which is spoken in a town of Zhenfeng county, Guizhou Province. The data were drawn from *Bouyei-Thai-Chinese-English Dictionary* (Zhou et al. forthcoming) and *Kam-Tai Oral Literatures* (Somsonge et al. 1998).

This paper presents the word order variation of Bouyei language in comparison with Thai, its genetically related language, and Chinese, the language which is used along with the Bouyei language. It supports the claim made by other cross-

linguistic studies that the semantic and pragmatic relations, i.e., the information structure, are primarily the main determinants of word order variation rather than grammatical relations such as subject, direct object, and indirect object.

2. Canonical word order of the clause

As pointed out by Hawkins (1983:19-20), Greenberg's seminal paper "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements" (1966) has had a considerable impact on all subsequent work on word order universals. Greenberg proposed three universal word order types viz., VSO, SVO, and SOV, and argued that these different verb positions correlate in a principled way with other properties, such as languages with dominant VSO order are always prepositional. Along this main stream, Lehmann (1978:6) distinguished between two types of languages, VO and OV with VSO and SVO as the subtypes of the VO type. This typological analysis is based on the syntactic constructions in which the verb with regard to its object is most fundamental.

Based on the Theory of Word Order Universals posited by Greenberg and statistical count of occurrences, Bouyei seems to fit the subject-verb-object (SVO) type of language like its cousin language, Thai. However, either decontextualized isolated clauses as found in the *Bouyei-Thai-Chinese Dictionary* or contextualized clauses in the *Kam-Tai Oral Literatures* have other word order patterns, such as the predominant variation SOV, as well. The word order in Bouyei seems to be flexible and hence, according to Givón (1984:188), the Bouyei language can be classified as a flexible word order language in contrast to the rigid one.

Whether Bouyei is regarded as a SVO or SOV language, it has the features associated with both types of order according to Greenberg's typological scheme. For example a certain adverbial may follow a verb featuring the SVO and frequently another adverbial precedes its head, which is an SOV

concomitant. The SOV features found in the Bouyei language are listed with examples as follows:

1. SOV clauses occur:

(1)   *ðɯm²*   *pa⁴*   *n̪au²ða:n²*   *tu²*
        wind   PREP   roof   all

        ku:at²   *pin³θian¹*   *leu⁴*
        blow   upside down   already
        'The wind has turned the roof upside down.'

2. Certain adverbials precede the verbs:

(2)   *ken⁶ku²*   *su²*   *tɯ²*   *to¹*   *wɯn²*
        corncorb   easy   light   more   firewood
        'Corncorbs are easier to burn than firewood.'

3. Aspect markers follow the verb:

(3)   *ku¹*   *ku⁶ɣoŋ¹*   *taŋ¹ka:n⁶*
        I   work   in process
        'I am working.'

(4)   *ku¹*   *ɣam⁶ʔan⁵*   *ʔdai⁴*   *ðan¹*   *kua⁵*   *te¹*
        I   night before last   get   see   ever   him
        'I saw him the night before last night.'

4. Prepositional phrases precede the verbs:
  (except temporal and locational phrases as discussed below)

      The preverbal prepositional phrases are mostly the source or the point of departure of a path (5), beneficiary (6), and accompaniment (7).

(5)   *te¹*   *lɯŋ³*   *tai⁵*   *mɯi⁴kue²*   *ta:u¹ma¹*
        he   just   from   America   come back
        'He has just come back from America.'

(6)   *ʔau¹*   *pa³mai⁴*   *ma¹*   *ku¹*
         take   the end of the thread   come   I

         laŋ¹   *muɯŋ²*   *ta:m⁵*
         for   you   tie
         'Let me tie the thread for you.'

(7)   *ŋuan²so⁶*   *ku¹*   *ta:n¹tu²*   *ðiaŋ²*
         tomorrow   I   alone   with

         muɯŋ²   *ka:ŋ³*
         you   talk
         'I will talk to you alone tomorrow.'

The locational and temporal positions of the clauses, whether expressed by prepositional phrases or not may be preverbal or postverbal depending on the pragmatic and semantic factors.

The locational and temporal expressions which serve as a setting of the following events in a discourse are in the initial clause position (preverbal) as in example (8).

(8)   *mai⁶sau⁴*   *ŋa:m²po¹*   *ni⁴*   *su⁴*
         before   mountain pass   this   often

         pan²   *pu⁴ʔdip⁷*
         has   bandit
         'There were bandits in the mountain pass before.'

The locational expression which is the predicate argument indicating the location of action is preverbal (9-10) and is usually introduced by the preposition *ʔju⁵* 'in' and the directional verbs *pai¹* 'to go' and *ma¹* 'to come' whereas the one which signals the location of the participant or object is postverbal (11).